

Characters

- Wesley
- Ella
- Emma
- Taylor
- Weston
- Ellis
- Malcolm
- Emerson
- Slater

Act 1

ACT ONE

SCENE: Upstage center is a very plain breakfast table with a red oilcloth covering it. Four mismatched metal chairs are set one at each side of the table. Suspended in midair to stage right and stage left are two ruffled, red-checked curtains, slightly faded. In the down left corner of the stage are a working refrigerator and a small gas stove, set right up next to each other. In the down right corner is a pile of wooden debris, torn screen, etc., which are the remains of a broken door. Lights come up on WESLEY, in sweatshirt, jeans and cowboy boots, who is picking up the pieces of the door and throwing them methodically into an old wheelbarrow. This goes on for a while. Then WESLEY'S mother, ELLA, enters slowly from down left. She is a small woman wearing a bathrobe, pink fuzzy slippers, hair in curlers. She is just waking up and winds an alarm clock in her hand as she watches WESLEY sleepily. WESLEY keeps cleaning up the debris, ignoring her.

ELLA

(after a while)

You shouldn't be doing that.

WESLEY

I'm doing it.

ELLA

Yes, but you shouldn't be. He should be doing it. He's the one who broke it down.

WESLEY

He's not here.

ELLA

He's not back yet?

WESLEY

Nope.

ELLA

Well, just leave it until he gets back.

WESLEY

In the meantime we gotta' live in it.

ELLA

He'll be back. He can clean it up then.

(WESLEY goes on clearing the debris into the wheelbarrow. ELLA finishes winding the clock and then sets it on the stove.)

ELLA

(looking at clock)

I must've got to sleep at five in the morning.

WESLEY

Did you call the cops?

ELLA

Last night?

WESLEY

Yeah.

ELLA

Sure I called the cops. Are you kidding? I was in danger of my life. I was being threatened.

WESLEY

He wasn't threatening you.

ELLA

Are you kidding me? He broke the door down, didn't he?

WESLEY

He was just trying to get in.

ELLA

That's no way to get into a house. There's plenty of other ways to get into a house. He could've climbed through a window.

WESLEY

He was drunk.

ELLA

That's not my problem.

WESLEY

You locked the door.

ELLA

Sure I locked the door. I told him I was going to lock the door. I told him the next time that happened I was locking the door and he could sleep in a hotel.

WESLEY

Is that where he is now?

ELLA

How should I know?

WESLEY

He took the Packard I guess.

ELLA

If that's the one that's missing I guess that's the one he took.

WESLEY

How come you called the cops?

ELLA

I was scared.

WESLEY

You thought he was going to kill you?

ELLA

I thought — I thought, "I don't know who this is. I don't know who this is trying to break in here. Who is

this? It could be anyone."

WESLEY

I heard you screaming at each other.

ELLA

Yes.

WESLEY

So you must've known who it was.

ELLA

I wasn't sure. That was the frightening part. I could smell him right through the door.

WESLEY

He was drinking that much?

ELLA

Not that. His skin.

WESLEY

Oh.

ELLA

(*suddenly cheerful*)

You want some breakfast?

WESLEY

No thanks.

ELLA

(*going to refrigerator*)

Well I'm going to have some.

WESLEY

(*still cleaning*)

It's humiliating to have the cops come to your own house. Makes me feel like we're someone else.

ELLA

(*looking in refrigerator*)

There's no eggs but there's bacon and bread.

WESLEY

Makes me feel lonely. Like we're in trouble or something.

ELLA

(still looking in refrigerator)

We're not in trouble. He's in trouble, but we're not.

WESLEY

You didn't have to call the cops.

ELLA

(slamming refrigerator door and holding bacon and bread)

I told you, he was trying to kill me!

(They look at each other for a moment. ELLA breaks it by putting the bacon and bread down on top of the stove. WESLEY goes back to cleaning up the debris. He keeps talking as ELLA looks through the lower drawers of the stove and pulls out a frying pan. She lights one of the burners on the stove and starts cooking the bacon.)

WESLEY

(as he throws wood into wheelbarrow)

I was lying there on my back. I could smell the avocado blossoms. I could hear the coyotes. I could hear stock cars squealing down the street. I could feel myself in my bed in my room in this house in this town in this state in this country. I could feel this country close like it was part of my bones. I could feel the presence of all the people outside, at night, in the dark. Even sleeping people I could feel. Even all the sleeping animals. Dogs. Peacocks. Bulls. Even tractors sitting in the wetness, waiting for the sun to come up. I was looking straight up at the ceiling at all my model airplanes hanging by all their thin metal wires. Floating. Swaying very quietly like they were being blown by someone's breath. Cobwebs moving with them. Dust laying on their wings. Decals peeling off their wings. My P-39. My Messerschmitt. My Jap Zero. I could feel myself lying far below them on my bed like I was on the ocean and overhead they were on reconnaissance. Scouting me. Floating. Taking pictures of the enemy. Me, the enemy. I could feel the space around me like a big, black world. I listened like an animal. My listening was afraid. Afraid of sound. Tense. Like any second something could invade me. Some foreigner. Something undescrivable. Then I heard the Packard coming up the hill. From a mile off I could tell it was the Packard by the sound of the valves. The lifters have a sound like nothing else. Then I could picture my Dad driving it. Shifting unconsciously. Downshifting into

second for the last pull up the hill. I could feel the headlights closing in. Cutting through the orchard. I could see the trees being lit one after the other by the lights, then going back to black. My heart was pounding. Just from my Dad coming back. Then I heard him pull the brake. Lights go off. Key's turned off. Then a long silence. Him just sitting in the car. Just sitting. I picture him just sitting. What's he doing? Just sitting. Waiting to get out. Why's he waiting to get out? He's plastered and can't move. He's plastered and doesn't want to move. He's going to sleep there all night. He's slept there before. He's woken up with dew on the hood before.

Freezing headache. Teeth covered with peanuts. Then I hear the door of the Packard open. A pop of metal. Dogs barking down the road. Door slams. Feet. Paper bag being tucked under one arm. Paper bag covering "Tiger Rose." Feet coming. Feet walking toward the door. Feet stopping. Heart pounding. Sound of door not opening. Foot kicking door. Man's voice. Dad's voice. Dad calling Mom. No answer. Foot kicking. Foot kicking harder. Wood splitting. Man's voice. In the night. Foot kicking hard through door. One foot right through door. Bottle crashing. Glass breaking. Fist through door. Man cursing. Man going insane. Feet and hands tearing. Head smashing. Man yelling. Shoulder smashing. Whole body crashing. Woman screaming. Mom screaming. Mom screaming for police. Man throwing wood. Man throwing up. Mom calling cops. Dad crashing away. Back down driveway. Car door slamming. Ignition grinding. Wheels screaming. First gear grinding. Wheels screaming off down hill. Packard disappearing. Sound disappearing. No sound. No sight. Planes still hanging. Heart still pounding. No sound. Mom crying soft. Soft crying. Then no sound. Then softly crying. Then moving around through house. Then no moving. Then crying softly. Then stopping. Then, far off the freeway could be heard.

(WESLEY picks up one end of the wheelbarrow. He makes the sound of a car and pushes it off right, leaving ELLA alone at the stove watching the bacon. She speaks alone.)

ELLA

Now I know the first thing you'll think is that you've hurt yourself. That's only natural. You'll think that something drastic has gone wrong with your insides and that's why

you're bleeding. That's only a natural reaction. But I want you to know the truth. I want you to know all the facts before you go off and pick up a lot of lies. Now, the first thing is that you should never go swimming when that happens. It can cause you to bleed to death. The water draws it out of you.

(WESLEY' s sister, EMMA, enters from right. She is younger and dressed in a white and green 4-H Club uniform. She carries several hand-painted charts on the correct way to cut up a frying chicken. She sets the charts down on the table upstage and arranges them as ELLA talks to her as though she's just continuing the conversation.)

EMMA

But what if I'm invited? The Thompsons have a new heated pool. You should see it, Ma. They even got blue lights around it at night. It's really beautiful. Like a fancy hotel.

ELLA

(tending to the bacon)

I said no swimming and that's what I meant! This thing is no joke. Your whole life is changing. You don't want to live in ignorance do you?

EMMA

No, Ma.

ELLA

All right then. The next thing is sanitary napkins. You don't want to buy them out of any old machine in any old gas station bathroom. I know they say "sanitized" on the package but they're a far cry from "sanitized."

They're filthy in fact. They've been sitting around in those places for months. You don't know whose quarters go into those machines. Those quarters carry germs. Those innocent looking silver quarters with Washington's head staring straight ahead. His handsome jaw jutting out. Spewing germs all over those napkins.

EMMA

(*still arranging charts*)

How come they call them napkins?

ELLA

(*stopping for a second*)

What?

EMMA

How come they call them napkins?

ELLA

(*back to the bacon*)

Well, I don't know. I didn't make it up. Somebody called them napkins a long time ago and it just stuck.

EMMA

"Sanitary napkins."

ELLA

Yes.

EMMA

It's a funny sound. Like a hospital or something.

ELLA

Well that's what they should be like, but unfortunately they're not. They're not hospital clean that's for sure. And you should know that anything you stick up in there should be absolutely hospital clean.

EMMA

Stick up in where?

(ELLA *turns upstage toward EMMA, then changes the subject.*)

ELLA

What are those things?

EMMA

They're for my demonstration.

ELLA

What demonstration?

EMMA

How to cut up a frying chicken.

ELLA

(*back to bacon*)

Oh.

EMMA

For 4-H. You know. I'm giving a demonstration at the fair. I told you before. I hope you haven't used up my last chicken.

(EMMA *goes to refrigerator and looks inside for a chicken.*)

ELLA

I forgot you were doing that. I thought that wasn't for months yet.

EMMA

I told you it was this month. The fair's always this month. Every year it's this month.

ELLA

I forgot.

EMMA

Where's my chicken?

ELLA

(*innocently*)

What chicken?

EMMA

I had a fryer in here all ready to go. I killed it and dressed it and everything!

ELLA

It's not in there. All we got is bacon and bread.

EMMA

I just stuck it in here yesterday, Ma! You didn't use it did you?

ELLA

Why would I use it?

EMMA

For soup or something.

ELLA

Why should I use a fryer for soup. Don't be ridiculous.

EMMA

(*slamming refrigerator*)

It's not in there!

ELLA

Don't start screaming in here! Go outside and scream if you're going to scream!

(EMMA *storms off stage right*. ELLA *takes the bacon off the stove*. *Slight pause*, then EMMA *can be heard yelling off stage*. ELLA *puts some bread in the frying pan and starts frying it*.)

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

That was my chicken and you fucking boiled it! YOU BOILED MY CHICKEN! I RAISED THAT CHICKEN FROM THE INCUBATOR TO THE GRAVE AND YOU BOILED IT LIKE IT WAS ANY OLD FROZEN HUNK OF FLESH! YOU USED IT WITH NO CONSIDERATION FOR THE LABOR INVOLVED! I HAD

TO FEED THAT CHICKEN CRUSHED CORN EVERY MORNING FOR A YEAR! I HAD TO CHANGE ITS WATER! I HAD TO KILL IT WITH AN AX! I HAD TO SPILL ITS GUTS OUT! I HAD TO PLUCK EVERY FEATHER ON ITS BODY! I HAD TO DO ALL THAT WORK SO THAT YOU COULD TAKE IT AND BOIL IT!

(WESLEY *enters from left and crosses to center*.)

WESLEY

What's all the screaming?

ELLA

Somebody stole her chicken.

WESLEY

Stole it?

ELLA

Boiled it.

WESLEY

You boiled it.

ELLA

I didn't know it was hers.

WESLEY

Did it have her name on it?

ELLA

No, of course not.

WESLEY

Then she's got nothing to scream about.

(yelling off stage)

SHUT UP OUT THERE! YOU SHOULD'VE PUT YOUR NAME ON IT IF YOU DIDN'T WANT ANYBODY TO BOIL IT!

EMMA'S VOICE

(off)

EAT MY SOCKS!

WESLEY

(crossing up to table)

Great language.

(noticing charts on table)

What's all this stuff?

ELLA

Her charts. She's giving a demonstration.

WESLEY

(holding one of the charts up)

A demonstration? On what?

ELLA

How to cut up a chicken. What else.

(ELLA takes her bacon and bread on a plate and crosses up to table. She sits at the stage left end.)

WESLEY

Anybody knows how to cut up a chicken.

ELLA

Well, there's special bones you have to crack. Special ways of doing it evidently.

WESLEY

(turning downstage with chart held out in front of him)

What's so special about it.

ELLA

(eating at table)

The anatomy is what's special. The anatomy of a chicken. If you know the anatomy you're half-way home.

WESLEY

(facing front, laying chart down on floor)

It's just bones.

EMMA'S VOICE

(off)

THERE'S NO CONSIDERATION! IF I'D COME ACROSS A CHICKEN IN THE FREEZER I
WOULD'VE ASKED SOMEONE FIRST BEFORE I BOILED IT!

ELLA

(yelling, still eating)

NOT IF YOU WERE STARVING!

(WESLEY unzips his fly, takes out his pecker, and starts pissing all over the chart on the floor. ELLA just keeps eating at the table, not noticing.)

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

NO ONE'S STARVING IN THIS HOUSE! YOU'RE FEEDING YOUR FACE RIGHT NOW!

ELLA

So what!

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

SO NO ONE'S STARVING! WE DON'T BELONG TO THE STARVING CLASS!

ELLA

Don't speak unless you know what you're speaking about! There's no such thing as a starving class!

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

THERE IS SO! THERE'S A STARVING CLASS OF PEOPLE, AND WE'RE NOT PART OF IT!

ELLA

WE'RE HUNGRY, AND THAT'S STARVING ENOUGH FOR ME!

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

YOU'RE A SPOILED BRAT!

ELLA

(*to WESLEY*)

Did you hear what she called me?

(*she notices what he's doing, she yells to EMMA*)

EMMA!

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

WHAT!

ELLA

YOUR BROTHER'S PISSING ALL OVER YOUR CHARTS!

(goes back to eating)

(EMMA enters fast from right and watches WESLEY put his joint back in his pants and zip up. They stare at each other as ELLA goes on eating at the table.)

EMMA

What kind of a family is this?

ELLA

(not looking up)

I tried to stop him but he wouldn't listen.

EMMA

(to WESLEY)

Do you know how long I worked on those charts? I had to do research. I went to the library. I took out books. I spent hours.

WESLEY

It's a stupid thing to spend your time on.

EMMA

I'm leaving this house!

(she exists right)

ELLA

(calling after her but staying at table)

YOU'RE TOO YOUNG!

(to WESLEY)

She's too young to leave. It's ridiculous. I can't say I blame her but she's way too young. She's only just now having her first period.

WESLEY

(crossing to refrigerator)

Swell.

ELLA

Well, you don't know what it's like. It's very tough. You don't have to make things worse for her.

WESLEY

(opening refrigerator and staring into it)

I'm not. I'm opening up new possibilities for her. Now she'll have to do something else. It could change her whole direction in life. She'll look back and remember the day her brother pissed all over her charts and see that day as a turning point in her life.

ELLA

How do you figure?

WESLEY

Well, she's already decided to leave home. That's a beginning.

ELLA

(standing abruptly)

She's too young to leave! And get out of that refrigerator!

(She crosses to refrigerator and slams the door shut. WESLEY crosses up to the table and sits at the stage right end.)

ELLA

You're always in the refrigerator!

WESLEY

I'm hungry.

ELLA

How can you be hungry all the time? We're not poor. We're not rich but we're not poor.

WESLEY

What are we then?

ELLA

(crossing back to table and sitting opposite WESLEY)

We're somewhere in between.

(pause as ELLA starts to eat again; WESLEY watches her)

We're going to be rich though.

WESLEY

What do you mean?

ELLA

We're going to have some money real soon.

WESLEY

What're you talking about?

ELLA

Never mind. You just wait though. You'll be very surprised.

WESLEY

I thought Dad got fired.

ELLA

He did. This has nothing to do with your father.

WESLEY

Well, you're not working are you?

ELLA

Just never mind. I'll let you know when the time comes. And then we'll get out of this place, once and for all.

WESLEY

Where are we going?

ELLA

Europe maybe. Wouldn't you like to go to Europe?

WESLEY

No.

ELLA

Why not?

WESLEY

What's in Europe?

ELLA

They have everything in Europe. High art. Paintings. Castles. Buildings. Fancy food.

WESLEY

They got all that here.

ELLA

Why aren't you sensitive like your Grandfather was? I
always thought you were just like him, but you're not, are you?

WESLEY

No.

ELLA

Why aren't you? You're circumcized just like him. It's almost identical in fact.

WESLEY

How do you know?

ELLA

I looked. I looked at them both and I could see the similarity.

WESLEY

He's dead.

ELLA

When he was alive is when I looked. Don't be ridiculous.

WESLEY

What'd you sneak into his room or something?

ELLA

We lived in a small house.

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

WHERE'S MY JODHPURS!

ELLA

(*to WESLEY*)

What's she yelling about?

WESLEY

Her jodhpurs.

ELLA

(*yelling to EMMA*)

What do you need your jodhpurs for?

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

I'M TAKING THE HORSE!

ELLA

DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! DO YOU KNOW HOW FAR YOU'LL GET ON THAT HORSE? NOT VERY FAR!

EMMA'S VOICE

(*off*)

FAR ENOUGH!

ELLA

YOU'RE NOT TAKING THE HORSE!

(*to* WESLEY)

Go down and lock that horse in the stall.

WESLEY

Let her go.

ELLA

On a horse? Are you crazy? She'll get killed on the freeway.

WESLEY

She won't take him on the freeway.

ELLA

That horse spooks at its own shadow.

(*yelling off to* EMMA)

EMMA, YOU'RE NOT TAKING THAT HORSE!

(*no answering from* EMMA)

EMMA!

(*to* WESLEY)

Go see if she went down there. I don't want her taking off on that horse. It's dangerous.

WESLEY

She's a good rider.

ELLA

I don't care!

WESLEY

You go down there then.

(*Pause. She looks at him.*)

ELLA

Well, maybe she'll be all right.

WESLEY

Sure she will. She's been out on overnight trail rides before.

ELLA

What a temper she's got.

WESLEY

She's just spoiled.

ELLA

No, she's not. I never gave her a thing extra. Nothing. Bare minimums. That's all.

WESLEY

The old man spoils her.

ELLA

He's never around. How could he spoil her?

WESLEY

When he's around he spoils her.

ELLA

That horse is a killer. I wish you'd go down there and check.

WESLEY

She can handle him.

ELLA

I've seen that horse get a new set of shoes and he's an idiot! They have to throw him down every time.

WESLEY

Look, where's this money coming from?

ELLA

What money?

WESLEY

This money that's going to make us rich.

ELLA

I'm selling the house.

(Long pause, as WESLEY stares at her. She turns away from him.)

ELLA

I'm selling the house, the land, the orchard, the tractor, the stock. Everything. It all goes.

WESLEY

It's not yours.

ELLA

It's mine as much as his!

WESLEY

You're not telling him?

ELLA

No! I'm not telling him and I shouldn't have told you. So just keep it under your hat.

WESLEY

How can you sell the house? It's not legal even.

ELLA

I signed the deed, same as him. We both signed it.

WESLEY

Then he has to co-sign the sale. Fifty-fifty.

ELLA

I already checked with a lawyer, and it's legal.

WESLEY

What about the mortgages? It's not even paid off, and you've borrowed money on it.

ELLA

Don't start questioning me! I've gone through all the arrangements already.

WESLEY

With who!

ELLA

I HAVE A LAWYER FRIEND!

WESLEY

A lawyer friend?

ELLA

Yes. He's very successful. He's handling everything for me.

WESLEY

You hired a lawyer?

ELLA

I told you, he's a friend. He's doing it as a favor.

WESLEY

You're not paying him?

ELLA

He's taking a percentage. A small percentage.

WESLEY

And you're just going to split with the money without telling anybody?

ELLA

I told you. That's enough. You could come with me.

WESLEY

This is where I live.

ELLA

Some home. It doesn't even have a front door now. Rain's going to pour right through here.

WESLEY

You won't even make enough to take a trip to San Diego off this house. It's infested with termites.

ELLA

This land is valuable. Everybody wants a good lot these days.

WESLEY

A lot?

ELLA

This is wonderful property for development. Do you know what land is selling for these days? Have you got any idea?

WESLEY

No.

ELLA

A lot. Tons. Thousands and thousands are being spent every day by ordinary people just on this very thing. Banks are loaning money right and left. Small family loans. People are building. Everyone wants a piece of land. It's the only sure investment. It can never depreciate like a car or a washing machine. Land will double its value in ten years. In less than that. Land is going up every day.

WESLEY

You're crazy.

ELLA

Why? For not being a sucker? Who takes care of this place?

WESLEY

Me!

ELLA

Ha! Are you kidding? What do you do? Feed a few sheep. Disc the orchard once in a while. Irrigate. What else?

WESLEY

I take care of it.

ELLA

I'm not talking about maintenance. I'm talking about fixing it up. Making it look like somebody lives here. Do you do that?

WESLEY

Somebody does live here!

ELLA

Who! Not your father!

WESLEY

He works on it. He does the watering.

ELLA

When he can stand up. How often is that? He comes in here and passes out on the floor for three days then disappears for a week. You call that work? I can't run this place by myself.

WESLEY

Nobody's asking you to!

ELLA

Nobody's asking me period! I'm selling it, and that's all there is to it!

(Long pause, as they sit there. WESLEY gets up fast.)

ELLA

Where are you going?

WESLEY

I'm gonna' feed the sheep!

(He exists left. ELLA calls after him.)

ELLA

Check on Emma for me would you, Wesley? I don't like her being down there all alone. That horse is crazy.

WESLEY'S VOICE

(off)

HE'S GOING TO KILL YOU WHEN HE FINDS OUT!

ELLA

(standing, shouting off)

HE'S NOT GOING TO FIND OUT!

(pause, as she waits for a reply; nothing; she yells again)

THE ONLY PERSON HE'S GOING TO KILL IS HIMSELF!

(Another pause, as she stands there waiting for WESLEY to reply. Nothing. She turns to the table and stares at the plate. She picks up the plate and carries it to the stove. She sets it on the stove. She stares at the stove. She turns toward refrigerator and looks at it. She crosses to refrigerator and opens it. She looks inside.)

ELLA

Nothing.

(She closes refrigerator door. She stares at refrigerator. She talks to herself.)

ELLA

He's not going to kill me. I have every right to sell. Every right. He doesn't have a leg to stand on.

(She stares at refrigerator, then opens it again and looks inside. EMMA enters from right, holding a rope halter in one hand, her white uniform covered in mud. She watches ELLA staring into refrigerator.)

EMMA

That bastard almost killed me.

(ELLA shuts refrigerator and turns toward EMMA.)

ELLA

What happened to you?

EMMA

He dragged me clear across the corral.

ELLA

I told you not to play around with that fool horse. He's insane, that horse.

EMMA

How am I ever going to get out of here?

ELLA

You're not going to get out of here. You're too young. Now go and change your clothes.

EMMA

I'm not too young to have babies, right?

ELLA

What do you mean?

EMMA

That's what bleeding is, right? That's what bleeding's for.

ELLA

Don't talk silly, and go change your uniform.

EMMA

This is the only one I've got.

ELLA

Well, change into something else then.

EMMA

I can't stay here forever.

ELLA

Nobody's staying here forever. We're all leaving.

EMMA

We are?

ELLA

Yes. We're going to Europe.

EMMA

Who is?

ELLA

All of us.

EMMA

Pop too?

ELLA

No. Probably not.

EMMA

How come? He'd like it in Europe wouldn't he?

ELLA

I don't know.

EMMA

You mean just you, me, and Wes are going to Europe? That sounds awful.

ELLA

Why? What's so awful about that? It could be a vacation.

EMMA

It'd be the same as it is here.

ELLA

No, it wouldn't! We'd be in Europe. A whole new place.

EMMA

But we'd all be the same people.

ELLA

What's the matter with you? Why do you say things like that?

EMMA

Well, we would be.

ELLA

I do my best to try to make things right. To try to change things. To bring a little adventure into our lives and you go and reduce the whole thing to smithereens.

EMMA

We don't have any money to go to Europe anyway.

ELLA

Go change your clothes!

EMMA

No.

(she crosses to table and sits stage right end.)

ELLA

If your father was here you'd go change your clothes.

EMMA

He's not.

ELLA

Why can't you just cooperate?

EMMA

Because it's deadly. It leads to dying.

ELLA

You're not old enough to talk like that.

EMMA

I was down there in the mud being dragged along.

ELLA

It's your own fault. I told you not to go down there.

EMMA

Suddenly everything changed. I wasn't the same person anymore. I was just a hunk of meat tied to a big animal. Being pulled.

ELLA

Maybe you'll understand the danger now.

EMMA

I had the whole trip planned out in my head. I was going to head for Baja California.

ELLA

Mexico?

EMMA

I was going to work on fishing boats. Deep sea fishing. Helping businessmen haul in huge swordfish and barracuda. I was going to work my way along the coast, stopping at all the little towns, speaking Spanish. I was going to learn to be a mechanic and work on four-wheel-drive vehicles that broke down. Transmissions. I could've learned to fix anything. Then I'd learn how to be a short-order cook and write novels on the side. In the kitchen. Kitchen novels. Then I'd get published and disappear into the heart of Mexico. Just like that guy.

ELLA

What guy?

EMMA

That guy who wrote *Treasure of Sierra Madre*.

ELLA

When did you see that?

EMMA

He had initials for a name. And he disappeared. Nobody knew where to send his royalties. He escaped.

ELLA

Snap out of it, Emma. You don't have that kind of a background to do jobs like that. That's not for you, that stuff. You can do beautiful embroidery; why do you want to be a mechanic?

EMMA

I like cars. I like travel. I like the idea of people breaking down and I'm the only one who can help them get on the road again. It would be like being a magician. Just open up the hood and cast your magic spell.

ELLA

What are you dreaming for?

EMMA

I'm not dreaming now. I was dreaming then. Right up to the point when I got the halter on. Then as soon as he took off I stopped. I stopped dreaming and saw myself being dragged through the mud.

ELLA

Go change your clothes.

EMMA

Stop saying that over and over as though by saying it you relieve yourself of responsibility.

ELLA

I can't even follow the way you talk to me anymore.

EMMA

That's good.

ELLA

Why is that good?

EMMA

Because if you could then that would mean that you understood me.

(Pause. ELLA turns and opens the refrigerator again and stares into it.)

EMMA

Hungry?

ELLA

No.

EMMA

Just habit?

ELLA

What?

EMMA

Opening and closing?

(ELLA closes refrigerator and turns toward EMMA.)

ELLA

Christ, Emma, what am I going to do with you?

EMMA

Let me go.

ELLA

(after pause)

You're too young.

(ELLA exits left. EMMA stays sitting at table. She looks around the space, then gets up slowly and crosses to the refrigerator. She pauses in front of it, then opens the door slowly and looks in. She speaks into refrigerator.)

EMMA

Hello? Anything in there? We're not broke you know, so you don't have to hide! I don't know where the money goes to but we're not broke! We're not part of the starving class!

(TAYLOR, the lawyer, enters from down right and watches EMMA as she speaks into refrigerator. He is dressed in a smart suit, middle-aged, with a briefcase. He just stands there watching her.)

EMMA

(into refrigerator)

Any corn muffins in there? Hello! Any produce? Any rutabagas? Any root vegetables? Nothing? It's all right. You don't have to be ashamed. I've had worse. I've had to take my lunch to school wrapped up in a Weber's bread wrapper. That's the worst. Worse than no lunch. So don't feel bad! You'll get some company before you know it! You'll get some little eggs tucked into your sides and some yellow margarine tucked into your little drawers and some frozen chicken tucked into your —

(pauses)

You haven't seen my chicken have you? You motherfucker!

(She slams the door to refrigerator and turns around. She sees TAYLOR standing there. They stare at each other. TAYLOR smiles.)

TAYLOR

Your mother home?

EMMA

I don't know.

TAYLOR

I saw her car out there so I thought she might be.

EMMA

That's not her car.

TAYLOR

Oh. I thought it was.

EMMA

It's my Dad's car.

TAYLOR

She drives it, doesn't she?

EMMA

He bought it.

TAYLOR

Oh. I see.

EMMA

It's a Kaiser-Fraser.

TAYLOR

Oh.

EMMA

He goes in for odd-ball cars. He's got a Packard, too.

TAYLOR

I see.

EMMA

Says they're the only ones made out of steel.

TAYLOR

Oh.

EMMA

He totaled that car but you'd never know it.

TAYLOR

The Packard?

EMMA

No, the other one.

TAYLOR

I see.

EMMA

Who are you anyway?

TAYLOR

My name's Taylor. I'm your mother's lawyer.

EMMA

Is she in trouble or something?

TAYLOR

No. Not at all.

EMMA

Then what are you doing here?

TAYLOR

Well, I've got some business with your mother.

EMMA

You're creepy.

TAYLOR

Oh, really?

EMMA

Yeah, really. You give me the creeps. There's something about you that's weird.

TAYLOR

Well, I did come to speak to your mother.

EMMA

I know, but you're speaking to me now.

TAYLOR

Yes.

(pause, as he looks around awkwardly)

Did someone break your door down?

EMMA

My Dad.

TAYLOR

Accident?

EMMA

No, he did it on purpose. He was pissed off.

TAYLOR

I see. He must have a terrible temper.

EMMA

What do you want?

TAYLOR

I told you —

EMMA

Yeah, but what do you want my mother for?

TAYLOR

We have some business.

EMMA

She's not a business woman. She's terrible at business.

TAYLOR

Why is that?

EMMA

She's a sucker. She'll believe anything.

TAYLOR

She seems level-headed enough to me.

EMMA

Depends on what you're using her for.

(*Pause, as TAYLOR looks at her.*)

TAYLOR

You don't have to be insulting.

EMMA

I got nothing to lose.

TAYLOR

You *are* her daughter, aren't you?

EMMA

What line of business are you in?

TAYLOR

Do you mind if I sit down?

EMMA

I don't mind. My Dad might mind, though.

TAYLOR

He's not home, is he?

EMMA

He might come home any second now.

TAYLOR

(*crossing to chair at table*)

Well, I'll just wait for your mother.

EMMA

He's got a terrible temper. He almost killed one guy he caught her with.

TAYLOR

(*sitting in stage right chair*)

You misunderstand me. I'm here on business.

EMMA

A short fuse they call it. Runs in the family. His father was just like him. And his father before him. Wesley is just like Pop, too. Like liquid dynamite.

TAYLOR

(*setting attaché case on table*)

Liquid dynamite?

EMMA

Yeah. What's that stuff called?

TAYLOR

I don't know.

EMMA

It's chemical. It's the same thing that makes him drink. Something in the blood. Hereditary. Highly explosive.

TAYLOR

Sounds dangerous.

EMMA

Yeah.

TAYLOR

Don't you get afraid living in an environment like this?

EMMA

No. The fear lies with the ones who carry the stuff in their blood, not the ones who don't. I don't have it in me.

TAYLOR

I see.

EMMA

Nitroglycerine. That's what it's called. Nitroglycerine.

TAYLOR

What do you mean?

EMMA

In the blood. Nitroglycerine.

TAYLOR

Do you think you could call your mother for me?

EMMA

(*yelling but looking straight at TAYLOR*)

MOM!!!

TAYLOR

(*after pause*)

Thank you.

EMMA

What do you want my mother for?

TAYLOR

(*getting irritated*)

I've already told you!

EMMA

Does she bleed?

TAYLOR

What?

EMMA

You know. Does she have blood coming out of her?

TAYLOR

I don't think I want to talk anymore.

EMMA

All right.

(EMMA crosses to table and sits opposite TAYLOR at the stage left end. She stares at him. They sit silently for a while. TAYLOR squirms nervously, taps on his attaché case. EMMA just watches him.)

TAYLOR

Marvelous house this is.

(pause, as she just looks at him)

The location I mean. The land is full of potential.

(pause)

Of course it's a shame to see agriculture being slowly pushed into the background in deference to low-cost housing, but that's simply a product of the times we live in. There's simply more people on the planet these days. That's all there is to it. Simple mathematics. More people demand more shelter. More shelter demands more land. It's an equation. We have to provide for the people some way. The new people. We're lucky to live in a country where that provision is possible. In some countries, like India for instance, it's simply not possible. People live under banana leaves.

(WESLEY enters from right carrying a small collapsible fence structure. He sets it up center stage to form a small rectangular enclosure. He turns and looks at TAYLOR, then turns to EMMA.)

WESLEY

(to EMMA)

Who's he?

EMMA

He's a lawyer.

(TAYLOR stands, smiling broadly at WESLEY and extending his hand. WESLEY doesn't shake but just looks at him.)

TAYLOR

Taylor. You must be the son.

WESLEY

Yeah, I'm the son.

(WESLEY exits right. TAYLOR sits down again. He smiles nervously at EMMA, who just stares at him.)

TAYLOR

It's a funny sensation.

EMMA

What?

TAYLOR

I feel like I'm on enemy territory.

EMMA

You are.

TAYLOR

I haven't felt this way since the war.

EMMA

What war?

(TAYLOR just looks at her. WESLEY enters again from right carrying a small live lamb. He sets the lamb down inside the fenced area. He watches the lamb as it moves around inside the fence.)

EMMA

(to WESLEY)

What's the matter with him?

WESLEY

(watching lamb)

Maggots.

EMMA

Can't you keep him outside? He'll spread germs in here.

WESLEY

(*watching lamb*)

You picked that up from Mom.

EMMA

Picked what up?

WESLEY

Germ. The idea of germs. Invisible germs mysteriously floating around in the air. Anything's a potential carrier.

TAYLOR

(*to WESLEY*)

Well, it does seem that if the animal has maggots it shouldn't be in the kitchen. Near the food.

WESLEY

We haven't got any food.

TAYLOR

Oh. Well, when you do have food you prepare it in here, don't you?

EMMA

That's nothing. My brother pisses on the floor in here.

TAYLOR

Do you always talk this way to strangers?

EMMA

Look, that's his piss right there on the floor. Right on my chart.

WESLEY

(*turning to TAYLOR*)

What're you doing here anyway?

TAYLOR

I don't feel I have to keep justifying myself all the time. I'm here to meet your mother.

WESLEY

Are you the one who's trying to sell the house?

TAYLOR

We're negotiating, yes.

EMMA

(*standing*)

What? Trying to sell what house? This house?

TAYLOR

(*to EMMA*)

Didn't she tell you?

WESLEY

She told me.

EMMA

Where are we going to live?

WESLEY

(*to EMMA*)

You're leaving home anyway. What do you care?

EMMA

(*yelling off stage*)

MOM!!!

TAYLOR

(*to WESLEY*)

I didn't mean to shock her or anything.

WESLEY

(*to TAYLOR*)

Aren't you going to talk to my old man?

TAYLOR

That's not necessary right now.

WESLEY

He'll never sell you know.

TAYLOR

Well, he may have to. According to your mother he owes a great deal of money.

EMMA

To who? Who does he owe money to?

TAYLOR

To everyone. He's in hock up to his ears.

EMMA

He doesn't owe a cent! Everything's paid for!

WESLEY

Emma, shut up! Go change your clothes.

EMMA

You shut up! This guy's a creep, and he's trying to sell us all down the river. He's a total meatball!

WESLEY

I know he's a meatball! Just shut up, will you?

EMMA

(*to* TAYLOR)

My Dad doesn't owe money to anyone!

TAYLOR

(*to* WESLEY)

I'm really sorry. I thought your mother told her.

(*ELLA enters from left in a dress and handbag with white gloves. TAYLOR stands when he sees her.*)

ELLA

What's all the shouting going on for? Oh, Mr' Taylor. I wasn't expecting you for another half-hour.

TAYLOR

Yes, I know. I saw the car out in front so I thought I'd stop in early.

ELLA

Well, I'm glad you did. Did you meet everyone?

TAYLOR

Yes, I did.

ELLA

(*noticing lamb*)

What's that animal doing in here, Wesley?

WESLEY

It's got maggots.

ELLA

Well, get him out of the kitchen.

WESLEY

It's the warmest part of the house.

ELLA

Get him out!

EMMA

Mom, are you selling this house?

ELLA

Who told her?

TAYLOR

Well, I'm afraid it slipped out.

ELLA

Emma, I'm not going to discuss it now. Go change your clothes.

EMMA

(*coldly*)

If you sell this house, I'm never going to see you again.

(EMMA *exits left*. TAYLOR *smiles, embarrassed*.)

TAYLOR

I'm very sorry. I assumed that she knew.

ELLA

It doesn't matter. She's leaving anyway. Now, Wes, I'm going out with Mr. Taylor for a little lunch and to discuss our business. When I come back I want that lamb out of the kitchen.

TAYLOR

(to WESLEY, *extending his hand again*)

It was very nice to have met you.

(WESLEY *ignores the gesture and just stares at him.*)

ELLA

(to TAYLOR)

He's sullen by nature. Picks it up from his father.

TAYLOR

I see.

(to WESLEY)

Nitroglycerine, too, I suppose?

(*chuckles*)

(ELLA and TAYLOR *start to exit off right. ELLA turns to WESLEY.*)

ELLA

Keep an eye out for Emma, Wes. She's got the curse. You know what that's like for a girl, the first time around.

(TAYLOR and ELLA *exit. WESLEY stands there for a while. He turns and looks at the lamb.*)

WESLEY

(*staring at lamb*)

"Eat American Lamb. Twenty million coyotes can't be wrong."

(*He crosses to refrigerator and opens it. He stares into it.*)

WESLEY

You're out of luck. Santa Claus hasn't come yet.

(*He slams refrigerator door and turns to lamb. He stares at lamb.*)

WESLEY

(*to lamb*)

You're lucky I'm not really starving. You're lucky this is a civilized household. You're lucky it's not Korea and the rains are pouring through the cardboard walls and you're tied to a log in the mud and you're drenched to the bone and you're skinny and starving, but it makes no difference because someone's starving more than you. Someone's hungry. And his hunger takes him outside with a knife and slits your throat and eats you raw. His hunger eats you, and you're starving.

(*Loud crash of garbage cans being knocked over off stage right. Sound of WESTON, WESLEY'S father, off right.*)

WESTON'S VOICE

(*off right*)

WHO PUT THE GODDAMN GARBAGE CANS RIGHT IN FRONT OF THE GODDAMN DOOR?

(WESLEY listens for a second, then bolts off stage left. More crashing is heard off right. General cursing from WESTON, then he enters from right with a large duffel bag full of laundry and a large bag full of groceries. He's a very big man, middle-aged, wearing a dark overcoat which looks like it's been slept in, a blue baseball cap, baggy pants, and tennis shoes. He's unshaven and slightly drunk. He takes a few steps and stops cold when he sees the lamb. He just stares at the lamb for a minute, then crosses to the table and sets the bag of groceries and the laundry on the table. He crosses back to center and looks at the lamb inside the fence.)

WESTON

(*to lamb*)

What in the hell are you doin' in here?

(*he looks around the space, to himself*)

Is this inside or outside? This is inside, right? This is the inside of the house. Even with the door out it's still the inside.

(*to lamb*)

Right?

(*to himself*)

Right.

(*to lamb*)

So what the hell are you doing in here if this is the inside?

(*he chuckles to himself*)

That's not funny.

(*He crosses to the refrigerator and opens it.*)

WESTON

Perfect! ZERO! ABSOLUTELY ZERO! NADA! GOOSE EGGS!

(*he yells at the house in general*)

WE'VE DONE IT AGAIN! WE'VE GONE AND LEFT EVERYTHING UP TO THE OLD MAN AGAIN!
ALL THE UPKEEP! THE MAINTENANCE! PERFECT!

(*He slams the refrigerator door and crosses back to the table.*)

WESTON

I don't even know why we keep a refrigerator in this house. All it's good for is slamming.

(*He picks up the bag of groceries and crosses back to the refrigerator, talking to himself.*)

WESTON

Slams all day long and through the night. SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! What's everybody hoping for, a miracle!
IS EVERYBODY HOPING FOR A MIRACLE?

(*He opens refrigerator as WESLEY enters from stage right and stops. WESTON'S back is to him.
WESTON starts taking artichokes out of the bag and putting them in the refrigerator.*)

WESTON

(*to house*)

THERE'S NO MORE MIRACLES! NO MIRACLES TODAY! THEY'VE BEEN ALL USED UP! IT'S
ONLY ME! MR` SLAVE LABOR HIMSELF COME HOME TO REPLENISH THE EMPTY LARDER!

WESLEY

What're you yelling for? There's nobody here.

(WESTON *wheels around facing WESLEY. WESLEY stays still.*)

WESTON

What the hell are you sneakin' up like that for? You coulda' got yourself killed!

WESLEY

What's in the bag?

WESTON

Groceries! What else. Somebody's gotta' feed this house.

(WESTON turns back to refrigerator and goes on putting more artichokes into it.)

WESLEY

What kind of groceries?

WESTON

Artichokes! What do you think?

WESLEY

(coming closer)

Artichokes?

WESTON

Yeah. Good desert artichokes. Picked 'em up for half-price out in Hot Springs.

WESLEY

You went all the way out there for artichokes?

WESTON

'Course not! What do you think I am, an idiot or something? I went out there to check on my land.

WESLEY

What land?

WESTON

My desert land! Now stop talking! Everything was all right until you came in. I was talking to myself and everything was all right.

(WESTON empties the bag into the refrigerator, then slams the door shut. He crunches up the bag and crosses back to the table. He opens up his bag of laundry and starts taking dirty clothes out and stacking them in piles on the table. WESLEY crosses to refrigerator and opens it, looks in at artichokes. He takes one out and looks at it closely, then puts it back in. They keep talking through all this.)

WESLEY

I didn't know you had land in the desert.

WESTON

'Course I do. I got an acre and a half out there.

WESLEY

You never told me.

WESTON

Why should I tell you? I told your mother.

WESLEY

She never told me.

WESTON

Aw, shut up, will ya'?

WESLEY

What kind of land is it?

WESTON

It's not what I expected, that's for sure.

WESLEY

What is it, then?

WESTON

It's just not what I expected. Some guy came to the door selling land. So I bought some.

WESLEY

What guy?

WESTON

Some guy. Looked respectable. Talked a real good line. Said it was an investment for the future. All kinds of great things were going to be developed. Golf courses, shopping centers, banks, sauna baths. All that kinda' stuff. So I bought it.

WESLEY

How much did you pay?

WESTON

Well, I didn't pay the whole thing. I put something down on it. I'm not stupid.

WESLEY

How much?

WESTON

Why should I tell you? I borrowed it, so it's none of your goddamn business how much it was!

WESLEY

But it turned out to be a hoax, huh?

WESTON

A real piece of shit. Just a bunch of strings on sticks, with the lizards blowing across it.

WESLEY

Nothing around it?

WESTON

Not a thing. Just desert. No way to even get water to the goddamn place. No way to even set a trailer on it.

WESLEY

Where's the guy now?

WESTON

How should I know! Where's your mother anyway?

WESLEY

(*shutting refrigerator*)

She went out.

WESTON

Yeah, I know she went out. The car's gone. Where'd she go to?

WESLEY

Don't know.

WESTON

(*bundling up empty duffel bag under his arm*)

Well, when she gets back tell her to do this laundry for me. Tell her not to put bleach in anything but the socks and no starch in the collars. Can you remember that?

WESLEY

Yeah, I think so. No bleach and no starch.

WESTON

That's it. You got it. Now don't forget.

(he heads for stage right)

WESLEY

Where are you going?

WESTON

Just never mind where I'm going! I can take care of myself.

(he stops and looks at the lamb)

What's the matter with the lamb?

WESLEY

Maggots.

WESTON

Poor little bugger. Put some a' that blue shit on it. That'll fix him up. You know that blue stuff in the bottle?

WESLEY

Yeah.

WESTON

Put some a' that on it.

(pauses a second, looks around)

You know I was even thinkin' a' sellin' this place.

WESLEY

You were?

WESTON

Yeah. Don't tell your mother though.

WESLEY

I won't.

WESTON

Bank probably won't let me, but I was thinkin' I could sell it and buy some land down in Mexico.

WESLEY

Why down there?

WESTON

I like it down there.

(looks at lamb again)

Don't forget about that blue stuff. Can't afford to lose any lambs. Only had but two sets a' twins this year, didn't we?

WESLEY

Three.

WESTON

Well, three then. It's not much.

(WESTON exits stage right. WESLEY looks at lamb. Lights fade to black.)

Act 2

ACT TWO

SCENE: Same set. Loud hammering and sawing heard in darkness. Lights come up slowly on WESLEY building a new door center stage. Hammers, nails, saw, and wood lying around, sawdust on floor. The fence enclosure and the lamb are gone. A big pot of artichokes is boiling away on the stove. WESTON'S dirty laundry is still in piles on the table. EMMA sits at the stage left end of the table making a new set of charts for her demonstration with magic markers and big sheets of cardboard. She is dressed in jodhpurs, riding boots, and a western shirt. Lights up full. They each continue working at their separate tasks in silence, each of them totally concentrated. WESLEY measures wood with a tape measure and then cuts it on one of the chairs with the saw. He nails pieces together. After a while they begin talking but still concentrate on their work.

EMMA

Do you think she's making it with that guy?

WESLEY

Who, Taylor? How should I know?

EMMA

I think she is. She's after him for his money.

WESLEY

He's after our money. Why should she be after his?

EMMA

What money?

WESLEY

Our potential money.

EMMA

This place couldn't be that valuable.

WESLEY

Not the way it is now, but they'll divide it up. Make lots out of it.

EMMA

She's after more than that.

WESLEY

More than what?

EMMA

Money. She's after esteem.

WESLEY

With Taylor?

EMMA

Yeah. She sees him as an easy ticket. She doesn't want to be stuck out here in the boonies all her life.

WESLEY

She shoulda' thought of that a long time ago.

EMMA

She couldn't. Not with Pop. He wouldn't let her think. She just went along with things.

WESLEY

She can't think. He can't either.

EMMA

Don't be too harsh.

WESLEY

How can they think when they're behind the eight ball all the time. They don't have time to think.

EMMA

How come you didn't tell me when Pop came in last night?

WESLEY

I don't know.

EMMA

You could've told me.

WESLEY

He just brought his dirty laundry and then left.

EMMA

He brought food, too.

WESLEY

Artichokes.

EMMA

Better than nothing.

(pause, as they work)

They're probably half way to Mexico by now.

WESLEY

Who?

EMMA

She's snuggling up to him and giggling and turning the dial on the radio. He's feeling proud of himself. He's buying her hot dogs and bragging about his business.

WESLEY

She'll be back.

EMMA

She's telling him all about us and about how Dad's crazy and trying to kill her all the time. She's happy to be on the road. To see new places go flashing by. They cross the border and gamble on the jai alai games. They head for Baja and swim along the beaches. They build campfires and roast fish at night. In the morning they take off again. But they break down somewhere outside a little place called Los Cerritos. They have to hike five miles into town. They come to a small beat-up gas station with one pump and a dog with three legs. There's only one mechanic in the whole town, and that's me. They don't recognize me though. They ask if I can fix their "carro," and I speak only Spanish. I've lost the knack for English by now. I understand them though and give them a lift back up the road in my rebuilt four-wheel-drive International. I jump out and look inside the hood. I see that it's only the rotor inside the distributor that's broken, but I tell them that it needs an entire new generator, a new coil points and plugs, and some slight adjustments to the carburetor. It's an overnight job, and I'll have to charge them for labor. So I set a cot up for them in the garage, and after

they've fallen asleep I take out the entire engine and put in a rebuilt Volkswagen block. In the morning I charge them double for labor, see them on their way, and then resell their engine for a small mint.

WESLEY

If you're not doing anything, would you check the artichokes?

EMMA

I am doing something.

WESLEY

What?

EMMA

I'm remaking my charts.

WESLEY

What do you spend your time on that stuff for? You should be doing more important stuff.

EMMA

Like checking artichokes?

WESLEY

Yeah!

EMMA

You check the artichokes. I'm busy.

WESLEY

You're on the rag.

EMMA

Don't get personal. It's not nice. You should have more consideration.

WESLEY

Just put some water in them, would you? Before they burn.

(EMMA throws down her magic marker and crosses to the pot of artichokes. She looks in the pot and then crosses back to her chair and goes on working on her charts.)

WESLEY

Are they all right?

EMMA

Perfect. Just like a little boiling paradise in a pot. What're you making anyway?

WESLEY

A new door. What's it look like?

EMMA

Looks like a bunch of sawed-up wood to me.

WESLEY

At least it's practical.

EMMA

We're doing okay without a front door. Besides it might turn off potential buyers. Makes the place look like a chicken shack.

(*remembers her chicken*)

Oh, my chicken! I could've killed her right then.

WESLEY

You don't understand what's happening yet, do you?

EMMA

With what?

WESLEY

The house. You think it's Mr` and Mrs` America who're gonna' buy this place, but it's not. It's Taylor.

EMMA

He's a lawyer.

WESLEY

He works for an agency. Land development.

EMMA

So what?

WESLEY

So it means more than losing a house. It means losing a country.

EMMA

You make it sound like an invasion.

WESLEY

It is. It's a zombie invasion. Taylor is the head zombie. He's the scout for the other zombies. He's only a sign that more zombies are on their way. They'll be filing through the door pretty soon.

EMMA

Once you get it built.

WESLEY

There'll be bulldozers crashing through the orchard. There'll be giant steel balls crashing through the walls. There'll be foremen with their sleeves rolled up and blueprints under their arms. There'll be steel girders spanning acres of land. Cement pilings. Prefab walls. Zombie architecture, owned by invisible zombies, built by zombies for the use and convenience of all other zombies. A zombie city! Right here! Right where we're living now.

EMMA

We could occupy it. Dad's got a gun.

WESLEY

It's a Jap gun.

EMMA

It works. I saw him shoot a peacock with it once.

WESLEY

A peacock?

EMMA

Blasted it to smithereens. It was sitting right out there in the sycamore tree. It was screaming all night long.

WESLEY

Probably mating season.

EMMA

(*after long pause*)

You think they'll come back?

WESLEY

Who?

EMMA

Our parents.

WESLEY

You mean ever?

EMMA

Yeah. Maybe they'll never come back, and we'll have the whole place to ourselves. We could do a lot with this place.

WESLEY

I'm not staying here forever.

EMMA

Where are you going?

WESLEY

I don't know. Alaska, maybe.

EMMA

Alaska?

WESLEY

Sure. Why not?

EMMA

What's in Alaska?

WESLEY

The frontier.

EMMA

Are you crazy? It's all frozen and full of rapers.

WESLEY

It's full of possibilities. It's undiscovered.

EMMA

Who wants to discover a bunch of ice?

(WESTON suddenly stumbles on from stage right. He's considerably

drunker than the last time. EMMA stands at the table, not knowing whether to stay or leave. WESTON looks

at her.)

WESTON

(*to* EMMA)

Just relax. Relax! It's only your old man. Sit down!

(EMMA *sits again*. WESLEY *stands by awkwardly*. WESTON *looks at the wood on the floor*.)

WESTON

(*to* WESLEY)

What the hell's all this? You building a barn in here or something?

WESLEY

New door.

WESTON

What! Don't talk with your voice in the back of your throat like a worm! Talk with your teeth! Talk!

WESLEY

I am talking.

WESTON

All right. Now I asked you what all this is. What is all this?

WESLEY

It's a new door.

WESTON

What's a new door? What's the matter with the old door?

WESLEY

It's gone.

(WESTON *turns around, weaving slightly, and looks off stage right*.)

WESTON

Oh.

(*he turns back to* WESLEY)

Where'd it go?

WESLEY

You broke it down.

WESTON

Oh.

(*he looks toward table*)

My laundry done yet?

EMMA

She didn't come back yet.

WESTON

Who didn't?

EMMA

Mom.

WESTON

She didn't come back yet? It's been all night. Hasn't it been all night?

EMMA

Yes.

WESTON

Hasn't the sun rised and falled on this miserable planet?

EMMA

Yes.

WESTON

(*turning to WESLEY*)

So where's she been?

WESLEY

Don't know.

WESTON

Don't pull that one! Don't pull that one on me!

(He starts to come after WESLEY. WESLEY backs off fast. WESTON stops. He stands there weaving in place.)

WESLEY

I don't know. Really.

WESTON

Don't try protecting her! There's no protection! Understand! None! She's had it!

WESLEY

I don't know where she went.

EMMA

She went with a lawyer.

(WESTON turns to EMMA slowly.)

WESTON

A what?

EMMA

A lawyer.

WESTON

What's a lawyer? A law man? A person of the law?

(suddenly yelling)

WHAT'S A LAWYER?

EMMA

A guy named Taylor.

(Long pause, as WESTON stares at her drunkenly, trying to fathom it. Then he turns to WESLEY.)

WESTON

(to WESLEY)

Taylor? You knew?

WESLEY

I thought she'd be back by now. She said she was going out for a business lunch.

WESTON

You knew!

EMMA

Maybe they had an accident.

WESTON

(*to EMMA*)

In my car! In my Kaiser-Fraser! I'll break his fucking back!

WESLEY

Maybe they did have an accident. I'll call the hospitals.

WESTON

DON'T CALL ANYBODY!

(*quieter*)

Don't call anybody.

(*pause*)

That car was an antique. Worth a fortune.

EMMA

(*after long pause*)

You wanna' sit down, Pop?

WESTON

I'm standing. What's that smell in here? What's that smell!

WESLEY

Artichokes.

WESTON

They smell like that?

WESLEY

They're boiling.

WESTON

Stop them from boiling! They might boil over.

(WESLEY *goes to stove and turns it off.*)

WESTON

Where's that goddamn sheep you had in here? Is that what you're building? A barn for that sheep?

WESLEY

A door.

WESTON

(*staggering*)

I gotta sit down.

(*He stumbles toward table and sits at stage right end. EMMA stands.*)

WESTON

(*to EMMA*)

Sit down! Sit back down! Turn off those artichokes!

WESLEY

I did.

WESTON

(*pushing laundry to one side*)

She didn't do any of this. It's the same as when I brought it. None of it!

EMMA

I'll do it.

WESTON

No, you won't do it! You let her do it! It's her job! What does she do around here anyway? Do you know? What does she do all day long? What does a woman do?

EMMA

I don't know.

WESTON

You should be in school.

EMMA

It's all right if I do it. I don't mind doing it.

WESTON

YOU'RE NOT DOING IT!

(*long silence*)

What do you think of this place?

EMMA

The house?

WESTON

The whole thing. The whole fandango! The orchard! The air! The night sky!

EMMA

It's all right.

WESTON

(*to WESLEY*)

What do you think of it?

WESLEY

I wouldn't sell it.

WESTON

You wouldn't sell it. You couldn't sell it! It's not yours!

WESLEY

I know. But I wouldn't if it was.

WESTON

How come? What good is it? What good's it doing?

WESLEY

It's just here. And we're on it. And we wouldn't be if it got sold.

WESTON

Very sound reasoning. Very sound.

(*turns to EMMA*)

Your brother never was much in the brain department, was he? You're the one who's such a smart-ass. You're

the straight-A student, aren't you?

EMMA

Yes.

WESTON

Straight-A's and you're moldering around this dump. What're you going to do with yourself?

EMMA

I don't know.

WESTON

You don't know. Well you better think of something fast, because I've found a buyer.

(*silence*)

I've found someone to give me cash. Cash on the line!

(*he slams table with his hand. Long silence, then EMMA gets up and exits off left.*)

WESTON

What's the matter with her?

WESLEY

I don't know. She's got her first period.

WESTON

Her what? She's too young for that. That's not supposed to happen when they're that age. It's premature.

WESLEY

She's got it.

WESTON

What happens when I'm gone, you all sit around and talk about your periods? You're not supposed to know when your sister has her period! That's confidential between women. They keep it a secret that means.

WESLEY

I know what "confidential" means.

WESTON

Good.

WESLEY

Why don't you go to bed or something, so I can finish this door.

WESTON

What for? I told ya' I'm selling the joint. Why build a new door? No point in putting money into it.

WESLEY

I'm still living here. I'm living here right up to the point when I leave.

WESTON

Very brave. Very courageous outlook. I envy it in fact.

WESLEY

You do?

WESTON

Sure! Of course! What else is there to envy but an outlook? Look at mine! Look at my outlook. You don't envy it, right?

WESLEY

No.

WESTON

That's because it's full of poison. Infected. And you recognize poison, right? You recognize it when you see it?

WESLEY

Yes.

WESTON

Yes, you do. I can see that you do. My poison scares you.

WESLEY

Doesn't scare me.

WESTON

No?

WESLEY

No.

WESTON

Good. You're growing up. I never saw my old man's poison until I was much older than you. Much older.

And then you know how I recognized it?

WESLEY

How?

WESTON

Because I saw myself infected with it. That's how. I saw me carrying it around. His poison in my body. You think that's fair?

WESLEY

I don't know.

WESTON

Well, what do you think? You think I asked for it?

WESLEY

No.

WESTON

So it's unfair, right?

WESLEY

It's just the way it happened.

WESTON

I didn't ask for it, but I got it.

WESLEY

What is it anyway?

WESTON

What do you mean, what is it? You can see it for yourself!

WESLEY

I know it's there, but I don't know what it is.

WESTON

You'll find out.

WESLEY

How?

WESTON

How do you poison coyotes?

WESLEY

Strychnine.

WESTON

How! Not what!

WESLEY

You put it in the belly of a dead lamb.

WESTON

Right. Now do you see?

WESLEY

(*after pause*)

No.

WESTON

You're thick! You're really thick.

(*pause*)

You know I watched my old man move around. I watched him move through rooms. I watched him drive tractors, watched him watching baseball, watched him keeping out of the way of things. Out of the way of my mother. Away from my brothers. Watched him on the sidelines. Nobody saw him but me. Everybody was right here, but nobody saw him but me. He lived apart. Right in the midst of things and he lived apart. Nobody saw that.

(*Long pause.*)

WESLEY

You want an artichoke?

WESTON

No.

WESLEY

Who's the buyer?

WESTON

Some guy. Owns the "Alibi Club" downtown. Said he'll give me cash.

WESLEY

How much?

WESTON

Enough to get to Mexico. They can't touch me down there.

WESLEY

Who?

WESTON

None of your goddamn business! Why is it you always drive yourself under my skin when I'm around? Why is that?

WESLEY

We don't get along.

WESTON

Very smart! Very observant! What's the matter with you anyway? What're you doing around here?

WESLEY

I'm part of your offspring.

WESTON

Jesus, you're enough to drive a sane man crazy! You're like having an espionage spy around. Why are you watching me all the time?

(WESTON looks at him. They stare at each other for a moment.)

WESTON

You can watch me all you want to. You won't find out a thing.

WESLEY

Mom's trying to sell the place, too.

(WESTON looks at him hard.)

WESLEY

That's who the lawyer guy was. She's selling it through him.

(WESTON stands and almost topples over.)

WESTON

I'LL KILL HER! I'LL KILL BOTH OF THEM! Where's my gun? I had a gun here! A captured gun!

WESLEY

Take it easy.

WESTON

No, you take it easy! This whole thing has gone far enough! It's like living in a den of vipers! Spies! Conspiracies behind my back! I'M BEING TAKEN FOR A RIDE BY EVERY ONE OF YOU! I'm the one who works! I'm the one who brings home food! THIS IS MY HOUSE! I BOUGHT THIS HOUSE! AND I'M SELLING THIS HOUSE! AND I'M TAKING ALL THE MONEY BECAUSE IT'S OWED ME! YOU ALL OWE IT TO ME! EVERY LAST ONE OF YOU! SHE CAN'T STEAL THIS HOUSE AWAY FROM ME! IT'S MINE!

(He falls into table and collapses on it. He tries to keep himself from falling to the floor. WESLEY moves toward him.)

WESTON

JUST KEEP BACK! I'M NOT DYING, SO JUST KEEP BACK!

(He struggles to pull himself up on the table, knocking off dirty laundry and EMMA'S charts.)

WESTON

I don't need a bed. I don't need anything from you! I'll stay right here. DON'T ANYONE TRY TO MOVE ME! NOBODY! I'm staying right here.

(He finally gets on table so that he's lying flat out on it. He slowly goes unconscious. WESLEY watches him from a safe distance.)

WESLEY

(still standing there watching WESTON)

EMMA!

(no answer)

Oh, shit. Don't go out on me. Pop?

(He moves toward WESTON cautiously. WESTON comes to suddenly. Still lying on table.)

WESTON

DON'T GET TOO CLOSE!

(WESLEY *jumps back.*)

WESLEY

Wouldn't you rather be on the bed?

WESTON

I'm all right here. I'm numb. Don't feel a thing. Feels good to be numb.

WESLEY

We don't have to sell, you know. We could fix the place up.

WESTON

It's too late for that. I owe money.

WESLEY

I could get a job.

WESTON

You're gonna' have to.

WESLEY

I will. We could work this place by ourselves.

WESTON

Don't be stupid. There's not enough trees to make a living.

WESLEY

We could join the California Avocado Association. We could make a living that way.

WESTON

Get out of here! Get away from me!

WESLEY

Taylor can't buy this place without your signature.

WESTON

I'll kill him! If I have to, I'll kill myself along with him. I'll crash into him. I'll crash the Packard right into him. What's he look like?

(*no answer from* WESLEY)

WHAT'S HE LOOK LIKE?

WESLEY

Ordinary. Like a crook.

WESTON

(still lying on table)

I'll find him. Then I'll find that punk who sold me that phony desert land. I'll track them all down. Every last one of them. Your mother too. I'll track her down and shoot them in their bed. In their hotel bed. I'll splatter their brains all over the vibrating bed. I'll drag him into the hotel lobby and slit his throat. I was in the war. I know how to kill. I was over there. I know how to do it. I've done it before. It's no big deal. You just make an adjustment. You convince yourself it's all right. That's all. It's easy. You just slaughter them. Easy.

WESLEY

You don't have to kill him. It's illegal, what he's doing.

WESTON

HE'S WITH MY WIFE! THAT'S ILLEGAL!

WESLEY

She'll come back.

WESTON

He doesn't know what he's dealing with. He thinks I'm just like him. Cowardly. Sniveling. Sneaking around.

He's not counting on what's in my blood. He doesn't realize the explosiveness. We don't belong to the same class. He doesn't realize that. He's not counting on that. He's counting on me to use my reason. To talk things out. To have a conversation. To go out and have a business lunch and talk things over. He's not counting on murder. Murder's the farthest thing from his mind.

WESLEY

Just take it easy, Pop. Try to get some sleep.

WESTON

I am sleeping! I'm sleeping right here. I'm falling away. I was a flyer you know.

WESLEY

I know.

WESTON

I flew giant machines in the air. Giants! Bombers. What a sight. Over Italy. The Pacific. Islands. Giants. Oceans. Blue oceans.

(Slowly WESTON goes unconscious again as WESLEY watches him lying on table. WESLEY moves

toward him slightly.)

WESLEY

Pop?

(he moves in a little closer)

You asleep?

(He turns downstage and looks at the wood and tools. He looks toward the refrigerator. ELLA enters from down right carrying a bag of groceries. She stops when she sees WESLEY. WESLEY turns toward her. ELLA looks at WESTON lying on the table.)

ELLA

How long's he been here?

WESLEY

Just got here. Where have you been?

ELLA

(crossing to refrigerator)

Out.

WESLEY

Where's your boyfriend?

ELLA

(opening refrigerator)

Don't get insulting. Who put all these artichokes in here? What's going on?

WESLEY

Dad. He brought them back from the desert.

ELLA

What desert?

WESLEY

Hot Springs.

ELLA

Oh. He went down to look at his pathetic piece of property, I guess.

(ELLA sets the bag of groceries on the stove, then starts throwing the artichokes out onto the floor from the refrigerator.)

WESLEY

What are you doing?

ELLA

Throwing these out. It's a joke bringing artichokes back here when we're out of food.

WESLEY

How do you know about his desert property?

ELLA

I just know, that's all.

WESLEY

He told you? He never told me about it.

ELLA

I just happen to know he was screwed out of five hundred bucks. Let's leave it at that. Another shrewd business deal.

WESLEY

Taylor.

ELLA

(turning to WESLEY)

What?

WESLEY

Taylor sold it to him right?

ELLA

Don't be ridiculous.

(turns back to refrigerator)

WESLEY

How else would you know?

ELLA

He's not the only person in the world involved in real estate, you know.

WESLEY

He's been sneaking around here for months.

ELLA

Sneaking? He doesn't sneak. He comes right to the front door every time. He's very polite.

WESLEY

He's venomous.

ELLA

You're just jealous of him, that's all.

WESLEY

Don't give me that shit! It was him, wasn't it? I remember seeing him with his briefcase, wandering around the property.

ELLA

He's a speculator. That's his job. It's very important in this day and age to have someone who can accurately assess the value of land. To see its potential for the future.

(She starts putting all the groceries from her bag into the refrigerator.)

WESLEY

What exactly is he anyway? You told me he was a lawyer.

ELLA

I don't delve into his private affairs.

WESLEY

You don't, huh?

ELLA

Why are you so bitter all of a sudden?

WESLEY

It's not all of a sudden.

ELLA

I should think you'd be very happy to leave this place. To travel. To see other parts of the world.

WESLEY

I'm not leaving!

ELLA

Oh, yes you are. We all are. I've sealed the deal. It just needs one last little signature from me and it's finished. Everything. The beat-up cars, the rusted out tractor, the moldy avocados, the insane horse, the demented sheep, the chickens, the whole entire shooting match. The whole collection. Over.

WESLEY

Then you're free I suppose?

ELLA

Exactly.

WESLEY

Are you going off with him?

ELLA

I wish you'd get your mind out of the garbage. I'm on my own.

WESLEY

Where'd you get the groceries?

ELLA

I picked them up.

WESLEY

(*after pause*)

You know, you're too late. All your wheeling and dealing and you've missed the boat.

ELLA

(*closing refrigerator, turning to WESLEY*)

What do you mean?

WESLEY

Dad's already sold it.

ELLA

You must be crazy! He couldn't sell a shoestring! Look at him! Look at him lying there! Does that look like a man who could sell something as valuable as a piece of property? Does that look like competence to you? Take a look at him! He's pathetic!

WESLEY

I wouldn't wake him up if I were you.

ELLA

He can't hurt me now! I've got protection! If he lays a hand on me, I'll have him cut to ribbons! He's finished!

WESLEY

He's beat you to the punch and he doesn't even know it.

ELLA

Don't talk stupid! And get this junk out of here! I'm tired of looking at broken doors every time I come in here.

WESLEY

That's a new door.

ELLA

GET IT OUT OF HERE!

WESLEY

(*quietly*)

I told you, you better not wake him up.

ELLA

I'm not tiptoeing around anymore. I'm finished with feeling like a foreigner in my own house. I'm not afraid of him anymore.

WESLEY

You should be. He's going to kill Taylor, you know.

ELLA

He's always going to kill somebody! Every day he's going to kill somebody!

WESLEY

He means it this time. He's got nothing to lose.

ELLA

That's for sure!

WESLEY

He's going to kill you, too.

(ELLA is silent for a while. They look at each other.)

ELLA

Do you know what this is? It's a curse. I can feel it. It's invisible but it's there. It's always there. It comes onto us like nighttime. Every day I can feel it. Every day I can see it coming. And it always comes. Repeats itself. It comes even when you do everything to stop it from coming. Even when

you try to change it. And it goes back. Deep. It goes back and back to tiny little cells and genes. To atoms. To tiny little swimming things making up their minds without us. Plotting in the womb. Before that even. In the air. We're surrounded with it. It's bigger than government even. It goes forward too. We spread it. We pass it on. We inherit it and pass it down, and then pass it down again. It goes on and on like that without us.

(ELLIS, the owner of the "Alibi Club," enters from right and smiles at them. He is wearing a shiny yellow shirt, open at the collar, with a gold cross on a chain hanging from his neck. He's very burly, with tattoos all over his arms, tight-fitting pants, shiny shoes, lots of rings. He looks around and notices WESTON still lying on the table.)

ELLIS

A few too many "boiler-makers," huh? I keep telling him to go light, but it's like fartin' in the wind.

(laughs at his own joke)

You must be the wife and kids. Name's Ellis, I run the "Alibi Club," down in town. You must know it, huh?

(No reaction from ELLA and WESLEY.)

ELLIS

Well, the old man knows it, that's for sure. Down there pretty near every night. Regular steady. Always wondered where he slept. What's that smell in here?

WESLEY

Artichokes.

ELLIS

Artichokes, huh? Smells like stale piss.

(bursts out laughing; no reaction from others)

Never was big on vegetables myself. I'm a steak man. "Meat and blood," that's my motto. Keeps your bones hard as ivory.

ELLA

I know it may be asking a little bit too much to knock when there's no door to knock on, but do you always make a habit of just wandering into people's houses like you own them?

ELLIS

I do own it.

(*pause*)

That's right. Signed, sealed, and delivered. Got the cash right here.

(*He pulls out two big stacks of bills from his belt and waves them in the air.*)

ELLIS

Fifteen hundred in hard core mean green.

WESLEY

Fifteen hundred dollars!

(*looks at ELLA*)

ELLIS

That's what he owes. That's the price we agreed on. Look, buddy, I didn't even have to show up here with it.

Your old man's such a sap he signed the whole thing over to me without a dime even crossing the bar. I coulda' stung him easy. Just happens that I'm a man of honor.

ELLA

(*to WESLEY*)

Get him out of here!

ELLIS

(*coldly to WESLEY*)

I wouldn't try it, buddy boy.

(*ELLIS and WESLEY stare at each other. ELLIS smiles.*)

ELLIS

I've broken too many backs in my time, buddy. I'm not a hard man, but I'm strong as a bull calf, and I don't realize my own strength. It's terrible when that happens. You know? Before you know it, someone's hurt. Someone's lying there.

ELLA

This is a joke! You can't buy a piece of property from an alcoholic! He's not responsible for his actions!

ELLIS

He owns it, doesn't he?

ELLA

I OWN IT!

ELLIS

That's not what he told me.

ELLA

I own it and it's already been sold, so just get the hell out!

ELLIS

Well, I've got the deed right here.

(*he pulls deed out*)

Right here. Signed, sealed, and delivered. How do you explain that?

ELLA

It's not legal!

WESLEY

Who does he owe money to?

ELLIS

Oh, well, now I don't stick my nose where it doesn't belong. I just happen to know that he owes to some pretty hard fellas.

WESLEY

Fifteen hundred bucks?

ELLIS

That's about the size of it.

ELLA

Wake him up! We'll get to the bottom of this.

WESLEY

(*to ELLA*)

Are you crazy? If he sees you here he'll go off the deep end.

ELLA

(*going to WESTON and shaking him*)

I'll wake him up, then!

WESLEY

Oh, Jesus!

(WESTON *remains unconscious*. ELLA *keeps shaking him violently*.)

ELLA

Weston! Weston get up! Weston!

ELLIS

I've seen some hard cases in my time, but he's dedicated. That's for sure. Drinks like a Canadian. Flat out.

WESLEY

You say these guys are tough? What does he owe them for?

ELLIS

Look, buddy, he borrows all the time. He's a borrowing

fool. It could be anything. Payments on a car. Land in the desert. He's always got some fool scheme going. He's just let it slide too long this time, that's all.

WESLEY

What'll they do to him?

ELLIS

Nothing now. I've saved his hide. You should be kissing my feet.

ELLA

WESTON! GET UP!

(*She is tiring from shaking him*. WESTON *remains unconscious*.)

WESLEY

They'd kill him for fifteen hundred bucks?

ELLIS

Who said anything about killing? Did I say anything about killing?

WESLEY

No.

ELLIS

Then don't jump to conclusions. You can get in trouble that way.

WESLEY

Maybe you should deliver it to them.

ELLIS

Look, I've carried the ball this far, now he's gonna' have to do the rest. I'm not his bodyguard.

WESLEY

What if he takes off with it?

ELLIS

That's his problem.

WESLEY

Give it to me.

ELLIS

What?

WESLEY

The money. I'll deliver it.

ELLA

(*leaving* WESTON)

Wesley, don't you touch that money! It's tainted! Don't you touch it!

(ELLIS *and* WESLEY *look at each other.*)

WESLEY

You've got the deed. I'm his oldest son.

ELLA

You're his only son!

WESLEY

Just give it to me. I'll take care of it.

ELLIS

(*handing money to WESLEY*)

All right, buddy. Just don't go off half-cocked. That's a lot a' spendin' change for a young man.

(WESLEY *takes it.*)

ELLA

Wesley, it's illegal! You'll be an accomplice!

WESLEY

(*to ELLIS*)

Where do I find them?

ELLIS

That's your business, buddy. I'm just the buyer.

(ELLIS *walks around, looking over the place. ELLA crosses to WESLEY as WESLEY counts the money.*)

ELLA

Wesley, you give me that money! It doesn't belong to you! Give it to me!

WESLEY

(*looking at her coldly*)

There's not enough here to go to Europe on, Mom.

ELLIS

I was thinkin' of turning this place into a steak house. What do you think? Make a nice little steak house, don't you think?

WESLEY

(*still counting money*)

Sure.

ELLIS

People stop in off the highway, have a steak, a martini, afternoon cocktail, look out over the valley. Nice and peaceful. Might even put in a Japanese garden out front. Have a few goldfish swimming around. Maybe an eight-hole pitch-and-putt course right out there, too. Place is full of potential.

ELLA

Wesley!

(TAYLOR appears with attaché case stage right. ELLA turns and sees him. WESLEY keeps counting money.)

TAYLOR

Oh. I'm sorry. I didn't realize you had company.

(to ELLA)

I've got the final draft drawn up.

(TAYLOR crosses toward table, sees WESTON lying on it, stops, looks for a place to set down his attaché case.)

ELLA

(to TAYLOR)

It's too late.

TAYLOR

Excuse me? What's too late?

ELLA

The whole thing. Weston's sold it.

TAYLOR

That's silly. I've got the final draft right here in my case. All it needs is your signature.

ELLIS

Who's this character?

ELLA

(to TAYLOR)

He sold it for fifteen hundred dollars.

TAYLOR

(laughs)

That's impossible.

ELLA

There it is right there! Wesley's got it in his hands! Wesley's taking it!

TAYLOR

He can't sell this piece of property. He's incompetent. We've already been through that.

ELLIS

(*crossing to* TAYLOR)

Hey, listen, buddy. I don't know what your story is, but I suggest you get the fuck outa' here because this is my deal here. Understand? This is my little package.

TAYLOR

(*to* ELLA)

Who's this?

ELLA

He's the buyer.

WESLEY

(*to* TAYLOR)

Too slow on the trigger, Taylor. Took it right out from under you, didn't he?

TAYLOR

Well, it's simply a matter of going to court then. He doesn't have a leg to stand on. Legally he's a ward of the state. He can't sell land.

ELLIS

(*waving deed*)

Look, I checked this deed out at city hall, and everything's above board.

TAYLOR

The deed has nothing to do with it. I'm speaking of psychological responsibility.

WESLEY

Does that apply to buying the same as selling?

TAYLOR

(*to* EMMA)

What's he talking about?

ELLA

Nothing. Wesley, you give that money back!

WESLEY

Does that apply to buying dried up land in the middle of the desert with no water and a hundred miles from the nearest gas pump?

TAYLOR

(to WESLEY)

I think you're trying to divert the focus of the situation here. The point is that your father's psychologically and emotionally unfit to be responsible for his own actions, and, therefore, any legal negotiations issuing from him cannot be held binding. This can be easily proven in a court of law. We have first-hand evidence that he's prone to fits of violence. His license for driving has been revoked, and yet he still keeps driving. He's unable to get insurance. He's unable to hold a steady job. He's absent from his home ninety percent of the time. He has a jail record. It's an open and shut case.

ELLIS

(to TAYLOR)

What are you anyway? A lawyer or something? Where do you get off talkin' like that in my house!

ELLA

IT'S NOT YOUR HOUSE! THAT'S WHAT HE'S SAYING! CAN'T YOU LISTEN? DON'T YOU HAVE A BRAIN IN YOUR HEAD?

ELLIS

Listen, lady, I sell booze. You know what I mean? A lot a' weird stuff goes on in my bar, but I never seen anything as weird as this character. I never seen anything I couldn't handle.

WESLEY

You best take off, Taylor, before it all catches up to you.

TAYLOR

I refuse to be intimidated any further! I put myself out on a limb for this project and all I'm met with is resistance!

ELLA

I'm not resisting.

TAYLOR

(to WESLEY)

You may not realize it, but there's corporations

behind me! Executive management! People of influence. People with ambition who realize the importance of investing in the future. Of building this country up, not tearing it down. You people carry on as though the whole world revolved around your petty little existence. As though everything was holding its breath, waiting

for your next move. Well, it's not like that! Nobody's waiting! Everything's going forward! Everything's going ahead without you! The wheels are in motion. There's nothing you can do to turn it back. The only thing you can do is cooperate. To play ball. To become part of us. To invest in the future of this great land. Because if you don't, you'll all be left behind. Every last one of you. Left high and dry. And there'll be nothing to save you. Nothing and nobody.

(A policeman appears stage right in highway patrol gear.)

MALCOLM

Uh — excuse me. Mrs' Tate?

ELLA

Yes.

MALCOLM

Are you Mrs' Tate?

ELLA

Yes, I am.

MALCOLM

I'm sorry. I would have knocked but there's no door.

ELLA

That's all right.

(TAYLOR begins to move to stage left nervously. WESLEY watches him.)

MALCOLM

I'm Sergeant Malcolm, Highway Patrol.

ELLA

Well, what is it?

MALCOLM

You have a daughter, Emma Tate?

ELLA

Yes. What's wrong?

MALCOLM

She's been apprehended.

ELLA

What for?

MALCOLM

It seems she rode her horse through a bar downtown and shot the place full of holes with a rifle.

ELLA

What?

ELLIS

What bar?

MALCOLM

Place called the "Alibi Club." I wasn't there at the time, but they picked her up.

ELLIS

That's my club!

MALCOLM

(to ELLIS)

Are you the owner?

ELLIS

THAT'S MY CLUB!

MALCOLM

Are you Mr. Ellis?

ELLIS

What kind of damages?

MALCOLM

Well, we'll have to get an estimate, but it's pretty severe. Shot the whole place up. Just lucky there was no one in it at the time.

ELLIS

(to WESLEY)

Give me that money back!

(ELLIS *grabs money out of* WESLEY' s *hands. TAYLOR sneaks off stage left.*)

WESLEY

(*to cop*)

Hey! He's getting away! That guy's a crook!

MALCOLM

What guy?

WESLEY

(*moving toward stage left*)

That guy! That guy who just ran out of here! He's an embezzler! A confidence man! Whatever you call it. He sold my old man phony land!

MALCOLM

That's not within my jurisdiction.

ELLIS

(*to ELLA*)

I know he sent her down there. I wasn't born yesterday, ya' know! He's crazy if he thinks he can put that kind of muscle on me! What does he think he is anyway? I'm gonna' sue him blind for this! I'm gonna' take the shirt right off his back! I was trying to do him a favor! I was stickin' my neck out for him! You just tell him when he wakes up out of his stupor that he's in bigger trouble than he thinks! He ain't seen nothin' yet! You tell him.

(*starts to leave*)

And just remember that I own this place. It's mine! So don't try any more funny stuff. I got friends in high places, too. I deal directly with them all the time. Ain't that right, Sarge?

MALCOLM

I don't know about that. I'm here on other business.

ELLIS

(*to ELLA*)

You just tell him! I'll teach him to mess around with me!

(ELLIS *exits. Right.*)

ELLA

(*to cop*)

He's taking our money!

MALCOLM

Look, lady, your daughter's in jail. I don't know about any of this other stuff. I'm here about your daughter.

(WESLEY *runs off right*. ELLA *yells after him*.)

ELLA

WESLEY! WHERE ARE YOU GOING?

WESLEY'S VOICE

(*off*)

I'M GONNA' GET THAT MONEY BACK!

ELLA

IT'S NOT YOUR MONEY! COME BACK HERE! WESLEY!

(*she stops and looks at MALCOLM*)

Everybody's running off. Even Mr' Taylor. Did you hear the way he was talking to me? He was talking to me all different. All different than before. He wasn't nice at all.

MALCOLM

Mrs' Tate, what are we going to do about your daughter?

ELLA

I don't know. What should we do?

MALCOLM

Well, she has to stay in overnight, and if you don't want her back home she can be arraigned in juvenile court.

ELLA

We're all leaving here though. Everyone has to leave. She can't come home. There wouldn't be anyone here.

MALCOLM

You'll have to sign a statement then.

ELLA

What statement?

MALCOLM

Giving permission for the arraignment.

ELLA

All right.

MALCOLM

You'll have to come down with me unless you have a car.

ELLA

I have a car.

(*pause*)

Everyone's run away.

MALCOLM

Will you be all right by yourself?

ELLA

I am by myself.

MALCOLM

Yes, I know. Will you be all right or do you want to come with me in the patrol car?

ELLA

I'll be all right.

MALCOLM

I'll wait for you down at the station then.

(MALCOLM *exits*. ELLA *just stands there*.)

ELLA

(*to herself*)

Everybody ran away.

(WESTON *sits up with a jolt on the table*. ELLA *jumps*. They look at each other for a moment, then ELLA *runs off stage*. WESTON *just stays sitting up on the table*. He looks around the stage. He gets to his feet and *tries to steady himself*. He walks toward the refrigerator and kicks the artichokes out of his way. He opens refrigerator and looks in. Lights slowly fade to black with WESTON standing there looking into refrigerator.)

Act 3

ACT THREE

SCENE: *Same set. Stage is cleared of wood and tools and artichokes. Fence enclosure with the lamb inside is back, center stage. Pot of fresh coffee heating on the stove. All the laundry has been washed and WESTON is at the table to stage left folding it and stacking it in neat piles. He's minus his overcoat, baseball cap, and tennis shoes and wears a fresh clean shirt, new pants, shined shoes, and has had a shave. He seems sober now and in high spirits compared to before. The lamb is heard "baaing" in the dark as the lights slowly come up on WESTON at the table.*

WESTON

(to lamb as he folds clothes)

There's worse things than maggots ya' know. Much worse. Maggots go away if they're properly attended to. If you got someone around who can take the time. Who can recognize the signs. Who brings ya' in out of the cold, wet pasture and sets ya' up in a cushy situation like this. No lamb ever had it better. It's warm. It's free of draft, now that I got the new door up. There's no varmints. No coyotes. No eagles. No —

(looks over at lamb)

Should I tell ya' something about eagles? This is a true story. This is a true account. One time I was out in the fields doing the castrating, which is a thing that has to be done. It's not my favorite job, but it's something that just has to be done. I'd set myself up right beside the lean-to out there. Just a little roof-shelter thing out there with my best knife, some boiling water, and a hot iron to cauterize with. It's a bloody job on all accounts. Well, I had maybe a dozen spring ram lambs to do out there. I had 'em all gathered up away from the ewes in much the same kinda' set up as you got right there. Similar fence structure like that. It was a crisp, bright type a' morning. Air was real thin and you could see all the way out across the pasture land. Frost was still well bit down on the stems, right close to the ground. Maybe a couple a' crows and the ewes carrying on about their babies, and that was the only sound. Well, I was working away out there when I feel this shadow cross over me. I could feel it even before I saw it take shape on the ground. Felt like the way it does when the clouds move across the sun. Huge and black and cold like. So I look up, half expecting a buzzard or maybe a red-tail, but what hits me across the eyes is this giant eagle. Now I'm a flyer and I'm used to aeronautics, but this sucker was doin' some downright suicidal antics. Real low down like he's coming in for a landing or something, then changing his mind and pulling straight up again and sailing out away from me. So I watch him going small for a while, then turn back to my work. I do a couple more lambs maybe, and the same thing happens. Except this time he's even lower yet. Like I could almost feel his feathers on my back. I could hear his sound real clear. A giant bird. His wings made a kind of cracking noise. Then up he went again. I watched him longer this time, trying to figure out his intentions. Then I put the whole thing together. He was after those testes. Those fresh little remnants of manlihood. So I decided to oblige him this time and threw a few a' them on top a' the shed roof. Then I just went back to work again, pretending to be preoccupied. I was waitin' for him this time though. I was listening hard for him, knowing he'd be coming in from behind me. I was watchin' the ground for any sign of blackness. Nothing happened for about three more lambs, when all of a sudden he comes. Just like a thunder clap. Blam! He's down on that shed roof with his talons taking half the tar paper with him, wings whippin' the air, screaming like a bred mare then climbing straight back up into the sky again. I had to stand up on that one. Somethin' brought me straight up off the ground and I started yellin' my head off. I don't know why it was comin' outa' me but I was standing there with this icy feeling up my backbone and just yelling my fool head off. Cheerin' for that eagle. I'd never felt like that since the first day I went up in a B-49. After a while I sat down again and went on workin'. And every time I cut a lamb I'd throw those balls up on top a' the

shed roof. And every time he'd come down like the Cannonball Express on that roof. And every time I got that feeling.

(WESLEY *appears stage right with his face and hands bloody.*)

WESLEY

Then what?

WESTON

Were you listening to me?

WESLEY

What happens next?

WESTON

I was tellin' it to the lamb!

WESLEY

Tell it to me.

WESTON

You've already heard it. What happened to your face anyway?

WESLEY

Ran into a brick wall.

WESTON

Why don't ya' go clean up.

WESLEY

What happens next?

WESTON

I ain't tellin' it again!

WESLEY

Then I ain't cleaning up!

WESTON

What's the matter with you anyway? Are you drunk or something?

WESLEY

I was trying to get your money back.

WESTON

What money?

WESLEY

From Ellis.

WESTON

That punk. Don't waste your time. He's a punk crook.

WESLEY

He ran off with your money. And he's got the house too.

WESLEY

I've got the house! I've decided to stay.

WESLEY

What?

WESTON

I'm stayin'. I finished the new door. Did you notice?

WESLEY

No.

WESTON

Well, you shoulda' noticed. You walked right through it. What's the matter with you? I'm fixin' the whole place up. I decided.

WESLEY

You're fixing it up?

WESTON

Yeah. That's what I said. What's so unusual about that? This could be a great place if somebody'd take some interest in it. Why don't you have some coffee and clean yourself up a little. You look like forty miles a' rough road. Go ahead. There's fresh coffee on the stove.

(WESLEY crosses slowly to the stove and looks at the coffee.)

WESTON

I got up and took a walk around the place. Bright

and early. Don't think I've walked around the whole place for a couple a' years. I walked around and a funny

thing started happening to me.

WESLEY

(*looking at coffee*)

What?

WESTON

I started wondering who this was walking around in the orchard at six-thirty in the morning. It didn't feel like me. It was some character in a dark overcoat and tennis shoes and a baseball cap and stickers comin' out of his face. It didn't feel like the owner of a piece a' property as nice as this. Then I started to wonder who the owner was. I mean if I didn't feel like the owner, then who was the owner? I started wondering if the real owner was gonna' pop up out of nowhere and blast my brains out for trespassing. I started feeling like I should be running or hiding or something. Like I shouldn't be there in this kind of a neighborhood. Not that it's fancy or anything, but it's peaceful. It's real peaceful up here. Especially at that time a' the morning. Then it struck me that I actually was the owner. That somehow it was me and I was actually the one walking on my own piece of land. And that gave me a great feeling.

WESLEY

(*staring at coffee*)

It did?

WESTON

Yeah. So I came back in here, and the first thing I did was I took all my old clothes off and walked around here naked. Just walked through the whole damn house in my birthday suit. Tried to get the feeling of it really being me in my own house. It was like peeling off a whole person. A whole stranger. Then I walked straight in and made myself a hot bath. Hot as I could stand it. Just sank down into it and let it sink deep into the skin. Let it fog up all the windows and the glass on the medicine cabinet. Then I let all the water drain out, and then I filled the whole tub up again but this time with ice cold water. Just sat there and let it creep up on me until I was in up to my neck. Then I got out and took a shave and found myself some clean clothes. Then I came in here and fixed myself a big old breakfast of ham and eggs.

WESLEY

Ham and eggs?

WESTON

Yeah. Somebody left a whole mess a' groceries in the ice box. Surprised the hell outa' me. Just like Christmas. Just like somebody knew I was gonna' be reborn this morning or something. Couldn't believe my eyes.

(WESLEY *goes to refrigerator and looks in.*)

WESTON

Then I started makin' coffee and found myself doing all this stuff I used to do. Like I was coming back to my life after a long time a' being away.

WESLEY

(*staring in refrigerator*)

Mom brought this stuff.

WESTON

Then I started doing the laundry. All the laundry. I went around the house and found all the piles of dirty clothes I could get my hands on. Emma's, Ella's, even some a' yours. Some a' your socks. Found everybody's clothes. And every time I bent down to pick up somebody's clothes I could feel that person like they were right there in the room. Like the clothes were still attached to the person they belonged to. And I felt like I knew every single one of you. Every one. Like I knew you through the flesh and blood. Like our bodies were connected and we could never escape that. But I didn't feel like escaping. I felt like it was a good thing. It was good to be connected by blood like that. That a family wasn't just a social thing. It was an animal thing. It was a reason of nature that we were all together under the same roof. Not that we had to be but that we were supposed to be. And I started feeling glad about it. I started feeling full of hope.

WESLEY

(*staring in refrigerator*)

I'm starving.

WESTON

(*crossing to WESLEY*)

Look, go take a bath and get that crap off your face, and I'll make ya' some ham and eggs. What is that crap anyway?

WESLEY

Blood.

WESTON

He took a few swipes at ya', huh? Well go wash it off and come back in here. Go on!

WESLEY

(*turning to WESTON*)

He wouldn't give me the money, you know.

WESTON

So what. The guy's a knuckle-head. Don't have the brains God gave a chicken. Now go in there and clean up before *I* start swingin' on you.

(*WESLEY exits off left. WESTON starts taking ham and eggs out of refrigerator and fixing a breakfast at the stove. He yells off stage to WESLEY as he cooks.*)

WESTON

(*yelling*)

So I was thinkin' about that avocado deal you were talkin' about before! You know, joining up with the

"Growers Association" and everything! And I was thinkin' it might not be such a bad deal after all! I mean we don't have to hire Chicanos or nothin'! We could pick 'em ourselves and sell 'em direct to the company! How 'bout that idea! Cut down on the overhead! That tractor's still workin', isn't it? I mean the motor's not seized up or nothin', and we got plenty a' good pressure in the irrigation! I checked it this morning! Water's blastin' right through those pipes! Wouldn't take much to get the whole operation goin' full-tilt again! I'll resell that piece a' land out there! That'll give us somethin' to get us started! Somebody somewhere's gonna' want a good piece a' desert land! It's prime location even if it isn't being developed! Only a three-hour drive from Palm Springs, and you know what that's like! You know the kinda' people who frequent that place! One of 'em's bound to have some extra cash!

(*ELLA enters from stage right. She looks haggard and tired. She stands there looking at WESTON, who keeps cooking the eggs. Then she looks at the lamb. WESTON knows she's there but doesn't look at her.*)

ELLA

(*after pause*)

What's that lamb doing back in here?

WESTON

I got him back on his feet. It was nip and tuck there for a while. Didn't think he'd pull through. Maggots clear up into the small intestine.

ELLA

(*crossing to table*)

Spare me the details.

(*She pulls off her white gloves and sits exhausted into the chair at stage right. She looks at the piles of clean laundry.*)

WESTON

(*still cooking*)

Where you been anyway?

ELLA

Jail.

WESTON

Oh, they finally caught ya', huh?

(*chuckles*)

ELLA

Very humorous.

WESTON

You want some breakfast? I was just fixin' something up for Wes, here.

ELLA

You're cooking?

WESTON

Yeah. What's it look like?

ELLA

Who did all this laundry?

WESTON

Yours truly.

ELLA

Are you having a nervous breakdown or what?

WESTON

Can't a man do his own laundry?

ELLA

As far as I know he can.

WESTON

Even did some a' yours too.

ELLA

Gee, thanks.

WESTON

Well, I coulda' just left it. I was doin' a load of my own, so I thought I'd throw everybody else's in to boot.

ELLA

I'm very grateful.

WESTON

So where you been? Off with that fancy lawyer?

ELLA

I've been to jail, like I said.

WESTON

Come on. What, on a visit? They throw you in the drunk tank? Out with it.

ELLA

I was visiting your daughter.

WESTON

Oh, yeah? What'd they nab her for?

ELLA

Possession of firearms. Malicious vandalism. Breaking and entering. Assault. Violation of equestrian regulations. You name it.

WESTON

Well, she always was a fireball.

ELLA

Part of the inheritance, right?

WESTON

Right. Direct descendant.

ELLA

Well, I'm glad you've found a way of turning shame into a source of pride.

WESTON

What's shameful about it? Takes courage to get charged with all that stuff. It's not everyone her age who can run up a list of credits like that.

ELLA

That's for sure.

WESTON

Could you?

ELLA

Don't be ridiculous! I'm not self-destructive. Doesn't run in my family line.

WESTON

That's right. I never thought about it like that. You're the only one who doesn't have it. Only us.

ELLA

Oh, so now I'm the outsider.

WESTON

Well, it's true. You come from a different class of people. Gentle. Artists. They were all artists, weren't they?

ELLA

My grandfather was a pharmacist.

WESTON

Well, scientists then. Members of the professions. Professionals. Nobody raised their voice.

ELLA

That's bad?

WESTON

No. Just different. That's all. Just different.

ELLA

Are we waxing philosophical over our eggs now? Is that the idea? Sobered up over night, have we? Awoken to a brand-new morning? What is this crap! I've been down there all night trying to pull Emma back together again and I come

back to Mr' Hyde! Mr' "Goody Two-Shoes"! Mister Mia Copa himself! Well, you can kiss off with that crap because I'm not buying it!

WESTON

Would you like some coffee?

ELLA

NO, I DON'T WANT ANY GODDAMN COFFEE! AND GET THAT SON-OF-A-BITCHING SHEEP OUT OF MY KITCHEN!!

WESTON

(*staying cool*)

You've picked up on the language okay, but your inflection's off.

ELLA

There's nothing wrong with my inflection!

WESTON

Something doesn't ring true about it. Something deep in the voice. At the heart of things.

ELLA

Oh, you are really something. How can you accuse me of not measuring up to your standards! You're a complete washout!

WESTON

It's got nothing to do with standards. It's more like fate.

ELLA

Oh, knock it off, would you? I'm exhausted.

WESTON

Try the table. Nice and hard. It'll do wonders for you.

ELLA

(suddenly soft)

The table?

WESTON

Yeah. Just stretch yourself out. You'll be amazed. Better than any bed.

(ELLA looks at the table for a second, then starts pushing all the clean laundry off it onto the floor. She pulls herself up onto it and stretches out on it. WESTON goes on cooking with his back to her. She watches him as she lies there.)

WESTON

And when you wake up I'll have a great big breakfast of ham and eggs, ready and waiting. You'll feel like a million bucks. You'll wonder why you spent all those years in bed, once you feel that table. That table will deliver you.

(WESLEY wanders on stage from stage left, completely naked, his hair wet. He looks dazed. WESTON pays no attention but goes on preparing the breakfast and talking as WESLEY wanders upstage and stares at ELLA. She looks at him but doesn't react. He turns downstage and looks at WESTON. He looks at lamb and crosses down to it. He bends over and picks it up, then carries it off stage right. WESTON goes on cooking and talking. ELLA stays on table.)

WESTON

That's the trouble with too much comfort, you know? Makes you forget where you come from. Makes you lose touch. You think you're making headway but you're

losing all the time. You're falling behind more and more. You're going into a trance that you'll never come back from. You're being hypnotized. Your body's being mesmerized. You go into a coma. That's why you need a hard table once in a while to bring you back. A good hard table to bring you back to life.

ELLA

(*still on table, sleepily*)

You should have been a preacher.

WESTON

You think so?

ELLA

Great voice you have. Deep. Resonates.

WESTON

(*putting eggs on plate*)

I'm not a public person.

ELLA

I'm so exhausted.

WESTON

You just sleep.

ELLA

You should have seen that jail, Weston.

WESTON

I have.

ELLA

Oh, that's right. How could you ever sleep in a place like that?

WESTON

If you're numb enough you don't feel a thing.

(*he yells off stage to WESLEY*)

WES! YOUR BREAKFAST'S READY!

ELLA

He just went out.

WESTON

What?

ELLA

He just walked out stark naked with that sheep under his arm.

(WESTON looks at fence enclosure, sees lamb gone. He's still holding plate.)

WESTON

Where'd he go?

ELLA

Outside.

WESTON

(crossing right, carrying plate)

WES! GODDAMNIT, YOUR BREAKFAST'S READY!

(WESTON exits carrying plate off stage right. ELLA tries to keep her eyes open, still on table.)

ELLA

(to herself)

Nothing surprises me anymore.

(She slowly falls asleep on table. Nothing happens for a while. Then WESTON comes back on from right still carrying plate. ELLA stays asleep on table.)

WESTON

(crossing to stove)

He's not out there. Wouldn't ya' know it? Just when it's ready, he walks out.

(turning to ELLA)

Why'd he take the lamb? That lamb needs to be kept warm.

(sees that ELLA'S sound asleep)

Great.

(turns and sets plate down on

stove; looks at food)

Might as well eat it myself. A double breakfast. Why not?

(he starts eating off the plate, talks to himself)

Can't expect the thing to get well if it's not kept warm.

(he turns upstage again and looks at ELLA sleeping, then turns back to the plate of food)

Always was best at talkin' to myself. Always was the best thing. Nothing like it. Keeps ya' company at least.

(WESLEY enters from right dressed in WESTON' S baseball cap, overcoat, and tennis shoes. He stands there. WESTON looks at him. ELLA sleeps.)

WESTON

What in the hell's goin' on with you? I was yellin' for you just now. Didn't you hear me?

WESLEY

(staring at WESTON)

No.

WESTON

Your breakfast was all ready. Now it's cold. I've eaten half of it already. Almost half gone.

WESLEY

(blankly)

You can have it.

WESTON

What're you doin' in those clothes anyway?

WESLEY

I found them.

WESTON

I threw them out! What's got into you? You go take a bath and then put on some old bum's clothes that've been thrown-up in, pissed in, and God knows what all in?

WESLEY

They fit me.

WESTON

I can't fathom you, that's for sure. What'd you do with that lamb?

WESLEY

Butchered it.

WESTON

(turning away from him, disgusted)

I swear to God.

(pause, then turning to WESLEY)

WHAT'D YA' BUTCHER THE DUMB THING FOR!

WESLEY

We need some food.

WESTON

THE ICE BOX IS CRAMMED FULL A' FOOD!

(WESLEY crosses quickly to refrigerator, opens it, and starts pulling all kinds of food out and eating it ravenously. WESTON watches him, a little afraid of WESLEY'S state.)

WESTON

WHAT'D YA' GO AND BUTCHER IT FOR? HE WAS GETTING BETTER!

(watches WESLEY eating hungrily)

What's a' matter with you, boy? I made ya' a big breakfast. Why didn't ya' eat that? What's the matter with you?

(WESTON moves cautiously, away from WESLEY to stage right. WESLEY

keeps eating, throwing half-eaten food to one side and then digging into more. He groans slightly as he eats.)

WESTON

(to WESLEY)

Look, I know I ignored some a' the chores around the place and you had to do it instead a' me. But I brought you some artichokes back, didn't I? Didn't I do that? I didn't have to do that. I went outa' my way. I saw the sign on the highway and drove two miles outa' my way just to bring you back some artichokes.

(pause, as he looks at WESLEY eating; he glances nervously up at ELLA, then back to WESLEY)

You couldn't be all that starving! We're not that bad off, goddamnit! I've seen starving people in my time, and we're not that bad off!

(pause, no reaction from WESLEY, who continues to eat ravenously)

You just been spoiled, that's all! This is a paradise for a young person! There's kids your age who'd give their eyeteeth to have an environment like this to grow up in! You've got everything! Everything! Opportunity is glaring you in the teeth here!

(turns toward ELLA)

ELLA! ELLA, WAKE UP!

(no reaction from ELLA; turns back to WESLEY, still eating)

If this is supposed to make me feel guilty, it's not working! It's not working because I don't have to pay for my past now! Not now! Not after this morning! All that's behind me now! YOU UNDERSTAND ME? IT'S ALL OVER WITH BECAUSE I'VE BEEN REBORN! I'M A WHOLE NEW PERSON NOW! I'm a whole new person.

(WESLEY stops eating suddenly and turns to WESTON.)

WESLEY

(coldly)

They're going to kill you.

WESTON

(pause)

Who's going to kill me! What're you talking about! Nobody's going to kill me!

WESLEY

I couldn't get the money.

WESTON

What money?

WESLEY

Ellis.

WESTON

So what?

WESLEY

You owe it to them.

WESTON

Owe it to who? I don't remember anything. All that's over with now.

WESLEY

No, it's not. It's still there. Maybe you've changed, but you still owe them.

WESTON

I can't remember. Must've borrowed some for the car payment. Can't remember it.

WESLEY

They remember it.

WESTON

So, I'll get it to them. It's not that drastic.

WESLEY

How? Ellis has the house and everything now.

WESTON

How does he have the house? This is my house!

WESLEY

You signed it over.

WESTON

I never signed anything!

WESLEY

You were drunk.

WESTON

SHUT UP!

WESLEY

How're you going to pay them?

WESTON

(*pause*)

I can sell that land.

WESLEY

It's phony land. The guy's run off to Mexico.

WESTON

What guy?

WESLEY

Taylor. The lawyer. The lawyer friend of Mom's.

WESTON

(pause, looks at ELLA sleeping, then back to WESLEY)

Same guy?

WESLEY

Same guy. Ripped us all off.

WESTON

This isn't right. I was on a whole new track. I was getting right up on top of it all.

WESLEY

They've got it worked out so you can't.

WESTON

I was ready for a whole new attack. This isn't right!

WESLEY

They've moved in on us like a creeping disease. We didn't even notice.

WESTON

I just built a whole new door and everything. I washed all the laundry. I cleaned up all the artichokes. I started over.

WESLEY

You better run.

WESTON

Run? What do you mean, run? I can't run!

WESLEY

Take the Packard and get out of here.

WESTON

I can't run out on everything.

WESLEY

Why not?

WESTON

'CAUSE THIS IS WHERE I SETTLED DOWN! THIS IS WHERE THE LINE ENDED! RIGHT HERE! I MIGRATED TO THIS SPOT! I GOT NOWHERE TO GO TO! THIS IS IT!

WESLEY

Take the Packard.

(WESTON stands there for a while. He looks around, trying to figure a way out.)

WESTON

(after pause)

I remember now. I was in hock. I was in hock up to my elbows. See, I always figured on the future. I banked on it. I was banking on it getting better. It couldn't get worse, so I figured it'd just get better. I figured that's

why everyone wants you to buy things. Buy refrigerators. Buy cars, houses, lots, invest. They wouldn't be so generous if they didn't figure you had it comin' in. At some point it had to be comin' in. So I went along with it. Why not borrow if you know it's coming in. Why not make a touch here and there. They all want you to borrow anyhow. Banks, car lots, investors. The whole thing's geared to invisible money. You never hear the sound of change anymore. It's all plastic shuffling back and forth. It's all in everybody's heads. So I figured if that's the case, why not take advantage of it? Why not go in debt for a few grand if all it is is numbers? If it's all an idea and nothing's really there, why not take advantage? So I just went along with it, that's all. I just played ball.

WESLEY

You better go.

(Pause, as WESTON looks at ELLA sleeping.)

WESTON

Same guy, huh? She musta' known about it, too. She musta' thought I left her.

(WESTON turns and looks at WESLEY. Silence.)

WESLEY

You did.

WESTON

I just went off for a little while. Now and then. I couldn't stand it here. I couldn't stand the idea that everything would stay the same. That every morning it would be the same. I kept looking for it out there

somewhere. I kept trying to piece it together. The jumps. I couldn't figure out the jumps. From being born, to growing up, to droppin' bombs, to having kids, to hittin' bars, to this. It all turned on me somehow. It all turned around on me. I kept looking for it out there somewhere. And all the time it was right inside this house.

WESLEY

They'll be coming for you here. They know where you live now.

WESTON

Where should I go?

WESLEY

How 'bout Mexico?

WESTON

Mexico? Yeah. That's where everyone escapes to, right? It's full of escape artists down there. I could go down there and get lost. I could disappear. I could start a whole new life down there.

WESLEY

Maybe.

WESTON

I could find that guy and get my money back. That real estate guy. What's his name?

WESLEY

Taylor.

WESTON

Yeah, Taylor. He's down there too, right? I could find him.

WESLEY

Maybe.

WESTON

(*looking over at ELLA again*)

I can't believe she knew and still went off with him. She musta' thought I was dead or something. She musta' thought I was never coming back.

(WESTON moves toward ELLA, then stops. He looks at WESLEY, then turns and exits off right. WESLEY just stands there. WESLEY bends down and picks some scraps of food up off the floor and eats them very slowly. He looks at the empty lamb pen. EMMA enters from left, dressed as she was in Act 2. She crosses into center, looking in the direction of where WESTON went. WESLEY seems dazed as he slowly chews the food.

ELLA *stays asleep on table. EMMA carries a riding crop. She taps her leg with it as she looks off right.*)

EMMA

Mexico, huh? He won't last a day down there. They'll find him easy. Stupid going to Mexico. That's the first place they'll look.

(*to WESLEY*)

What're you eating?

WESLEY

Food.

EMMA

Off the floor? You'll wind up just like him. Diseased!

WESLEY

(*dazed*)

I'm hungry.

EMMA

You're sick! What're you doing with his clothes on? Are you supposed to be the head of the family now or something? The Big Cheese? Daddy Bear?

WESLEY

I tried his remedy, but it didn't work.

EMMA

He's got a remedy?

WESLEY

(*half to himself*)

I tried taking a hot bath. Hot as I could stand it. Then freezing cold. Then walking around naked. But it didn't work. Nothing happened. I was waiting for something to happen. I went outside. I was freezing cold out there and I looked for something to put over me. I started digging around in the garbage and I found his clothes.

EMMA

Digging around in the garbage?

WESLEY

I had the lamb's blood dripping down my arms. I thought it was me for a second. I thought it was me bleeding.

EMMA

You're disgusting. You're even more disgusting than him. And that's pretty disgusting.

(*looking at ELLA, still asleep*)

What's she doing?

WESLEY

I started putting all his clothes on. His baseball cap, his tennis shoes, his overcoat. And every time I put one thing on it seemed like a part of him was growing on me. I could feel him taking over me.

EMMA

(*crossing up to table, tapping crop on her leg*)

What is she, asleep or something?

(*she whacks ELLA across the butt with the riding crop*)

WAKE UP!

(*ELLA stays sleeping*)

WESLEY

I could feel myself retreating. I could feel him coming in and me going out. Just like the change of the guards.

EMMA

Well, don't eat your heart out about it. You did the best you could.

WESLEY

I didn't do a thing.

EMMA

That's what I mean.

WESLEY

I just grew up here.

EMMA

(*crossing down to WESLEY*)

Have you got any money?

(*WESLEY starts digging around in the pockets of the overcoat.*)

EMMA

What're you fishing around in there for? That's *his* coat.

WESLEY

I thought you were supposed to be in jail?

EMMA

(*crossing back up to table*)

I was.

WESLEY

What happened?

EMMA

(*picking up ELLA'S handbag and going through it*)

I used my ingenuity. I made use of my innate criminal intelligence.

(EMMA *throws things onto the floor from ELLA'S pocket book as she searches through it.*)

WESLEY

What'd you do?

EMMA

I got out.

WESLEY

I know, but how?

EMMA

I made sexual overtures to the sergeant. That's how. Easy.

(*She takes a big wad of money out of pocket book and a set of car keys, then throws the bag away. She holds up the money.*)

EMMA

I'm going into crime. It's the only thing that pays these days.

WESLEY

(*looking at roll of bills in EMMA'S hand*)

Where'd she get that?

EMMA

Where do you think?

WESLEY

You're taking her car?

EMMA

It's the perfect self-employment. Crime. No credentials. No diplomas. No overhead. No upkeep. Just straight profit. Right off the top.

WESLEY

How come I'm going backwards?

EMMA

(*moving in toward* WESLEY)

Because you don't look ahead. That's why. You don't see the writing on the wall. You gotta learn how to read these things, Wes. It's deadly otherwise. You can't believe people when they look you in the eyes. You gotta' look behind them. See what they're standing in front of. What they're hiding. Everybody's hiding, Wes' Everybody. Nobody looks like what they are.

WESLEY

What are you?

EMMA

(*moving away*)

I'm gone. I'm gone! Never to return.

(*ELLA suddenly wakes up on the table. She sits up straight.*)

ELLA

(*as though waking from a bad dream*)

EMMA!!

(*EMMA looks at her, then runs off stage left. ELLA sits there on table staring in horror at WESLEY. She doesn't recognize him.*)

ELLA

(*to* WESLEY)

Weston! Was that Emma?

WESLEY

It's me, Mom.

ELLA

(yelling off stage but still on table)

EMMA!!

(she jumps off table and looks for a coat)

We've got to catch her! She can't run off like that! That horse will kill her! Where's my coat?

(to WESLEY)

WHERE'S MY COAT?

WESLEY

You weren't wearing one.

ELLA

(to WESLEY)

Go catch her, Weston! She's your daughter! She's trying to run away!

WESLEY

Let her go.

ELLA

I can't let her go! I'm responsible!

(Huge explosion off stage. Flash of light, then silence. WESLEY and ELLA just stand there staring. EMERSON enters from right, giggling. He's a small man in a suit.)

EMERSON

Jeezus! Did you ever hear a thing like that? What a wallop! Jeezus Christ!

(giggles)

(WESLEY and ELLA look at him.)

EMERSON

Old Slater musta' packed it brim full. I never heard such a godalmighty bang in my whole career.

(SLATER, his partner, enters from right, holding out the skinned lamb carcass. He's taller than EMERSON, also in a suit. They both giggle as though they'd pulled off a halloween stunt.)

SLATER

Emerson, get a load a'this!

(giggling)

Did you see this thing?

(to WESLEY)

What is this, a skinned goat?

WESLEY

(blank)

Lamb.

SLATER

Oh, it's a lamb!

(they laugh)

Looks like somebody's afterbirth to me!

(they laugh hysterically)

WESLEY

What was that bang?

(They stop laughing and look at WESLEY. They laugh again, then stop.)

EMERSON

Bang? What bang?

WESLEY

That explosion.

EMERSON

Oh that! That was just a little reminder. A kind of a post-hypnotic suggestion.

(they laugh)

ELLA

Who are these men, Weston?

EMERSON

(*to* WESLEY)

Weston? You're Weston?

WESLEY

My father.

EMERSON

(*to* SLATER)

Looks a little young, don't ya' think?

SLATER

(*dropping lamb carcass into fence enclosure*)

Well, if she says he's Weston, he must be Weston.

ELLA

What are these men doing here?

(*she moves away from them*)

EMERSON

(*to* WESLEY)

So you're Weston? We had a different picture in mind. We had someone altogether different in mind.

WESLEY

What was it that blew up out there?

EMERSON

Something that wasn't paid for. Something past due.

SLATER

Long overdue.

WESLEY

The car. You blew up the car.

EMERSON

Bingo!

(*They crack up. WESLEY moves upstage and looks out as though trying to see outside.*)

ELLA

Get these men out of here, Weston! They're in my kitchen.

SLATER

(*looking around*)

Some mess in here, boy. I couldn't live like this if you paid me.

EMERSON

Well, that's what comes from not paying your bills.

You let one thing slide; first thing you know you let everything slide. You let everything go downhill until you wind up in a dungheap like this.

WESLEY

(*looking out, upstage*)

There's a fire out there.

SLATER

It'll go out. It's just a gelignite-nitro mixture. Doesn't burn for long. May leave a few scars on the lawn but nothin' permanent.

WESLEY

(*without emotion, still looking out*)

Nothing left of the car.

SLATER

That's right. Very thorough. The Irish developed it. Beautiful stuff. Never know what hit ya'.

EMERSON

(*to WESLEY*)

Well, we gotta' run, Weston. But you can get the general drift.

(*they start to leave; EMERSON stops*)

Oh, and if you see your old man, you might pass on the info. We hate to keep repeating ourselves. The first time is great, but after that it gets pretty boring.

SLATER

(*to WESLEY*)

Don't forget to give that lamb some milk. He looks pretty bad off.

(They both laugh loudly, then exit. ELLA is facing downstage now, staring at the lamb carcass in the pen. WESLEY has his back to her upstage. He looks out. Pause.)

ELLA

(staring at dead lamb)

I must've slept right through the day. How long did I sleep?

(They stay in these positions facing away from each other.)

WESLEY

Not so long.

ELLA

And Emma left. She really left on that horse. I didn't think she'd do it. I had a dream she was leaving. That's what woke me up.

WESLEY

She was right here in the kitchen.

ELLA

I must've slept right through it.

(pause, as she stares at lamb carcass)

Oh! You know what, Wes?

WESLEY

What?

ELLA

Something just went right through me. Just from looking at this lamb.

WESLEY

What?

ELLA

That story your father used to tell about that eagle. You remember that?

WESLEY

Yeah.

ELLA

You remember the whole thing?

WESLEY

Yeah.

ELLA

I don't. I remember something about it. But it just went right through me.

WESLEY

Oh.

ELLA

(*after pause*)

I remember he keeps coming back and swooping down on the shed roof and then flying off.

WESLEY

Yeah.

ELLA

What else?

WESLEY

I don't know.

ELLA

You remember. What happens next?

WESLEY

A cat comes.

ELLA

That's right. A big tom cat comes. Right out in the fields. And he jumps up on top of that roof to sniff around in all the entrails or whatever it was.

WESLEY

(*still with back to her*)

And that eagle comes down and picks up the cat in his talons and carries him screaming off into the sky.

ELLA

(staring at lamb)

That's right. And they fight. They fight like crazy in the middle of the sky. That cat's tearing his chest out, and the eagle's trying to drop him, but the cat won't let go because he knows if he falls he'll die.

WESLEY

And the eagle's being torn apart in midair. The eagle's trying to free himself from the cat, and the cat won't let go.

ELLA

And they come crashing down to the earth. Both of them come crashing down. Like one whole thing.

(They stay like that with WESLEY looking off upstage, his back to ELLA, and ELLA downstage, looking at the lamb. Lights fade very slowly to black.)